Adventure

February 1st

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Texas Man *by* William MacLeod Raine

FEBRUARY 1st ISSUE, 1928
VOL. LXV No. 4

ADVENTURE

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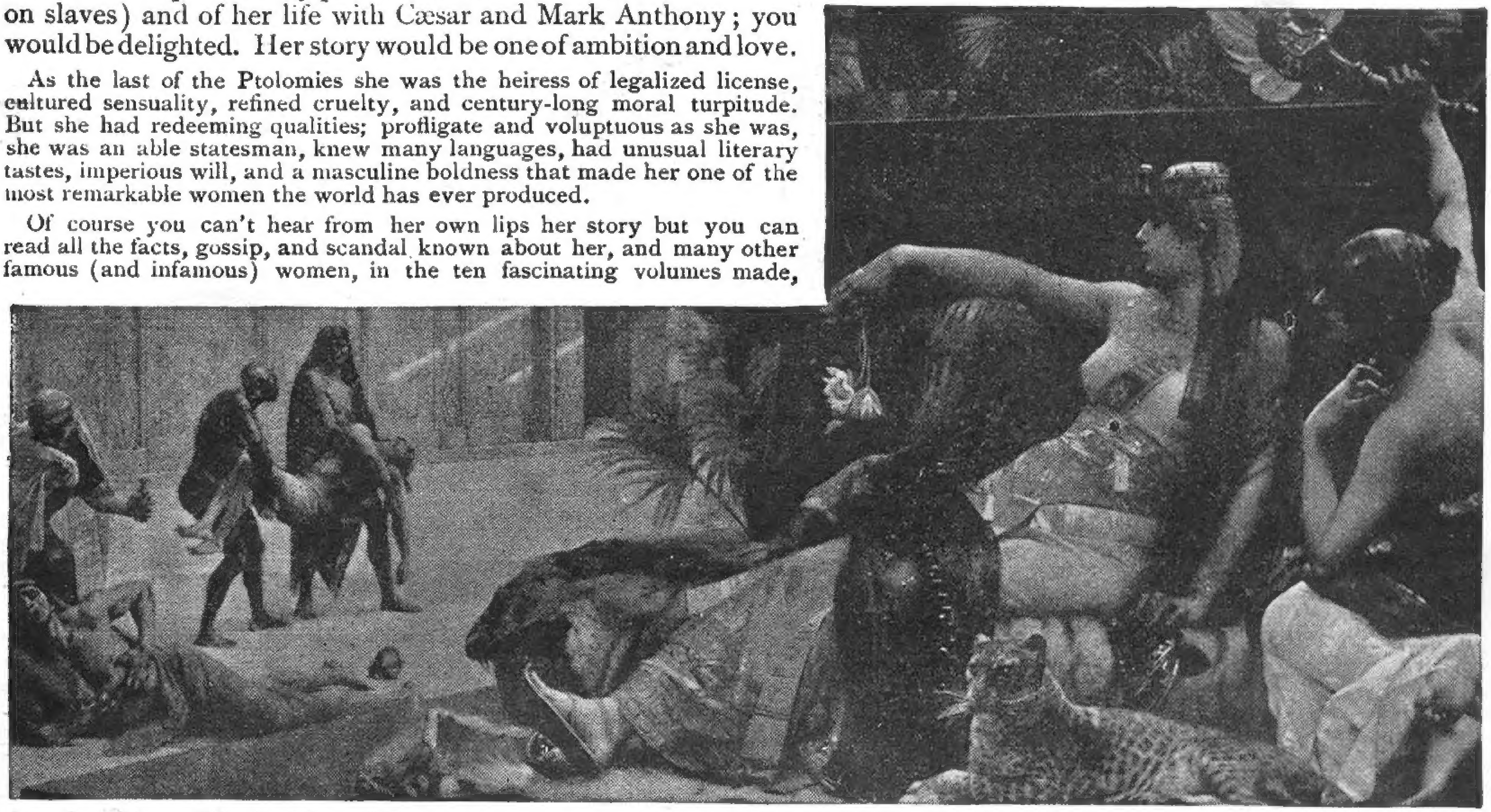

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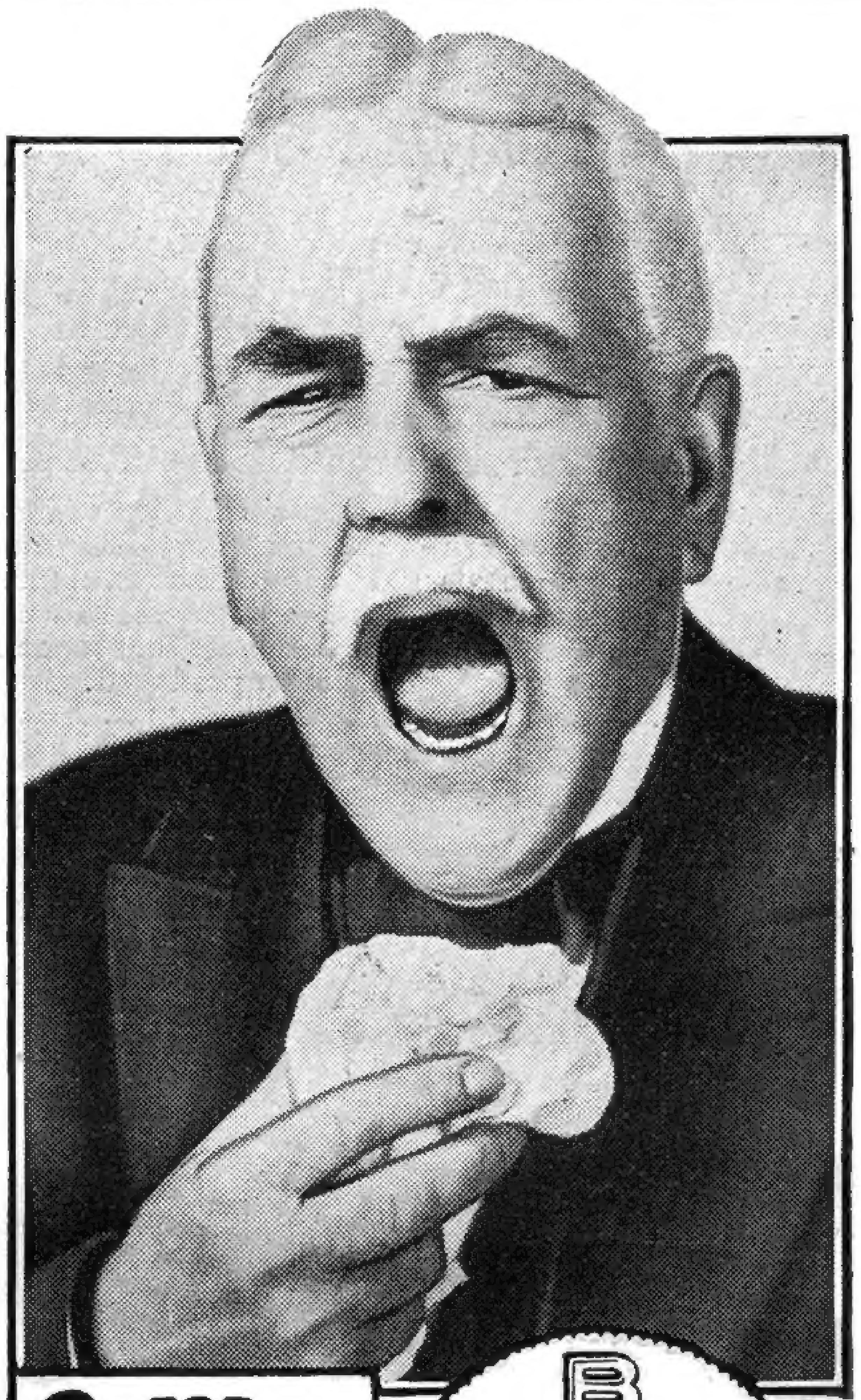

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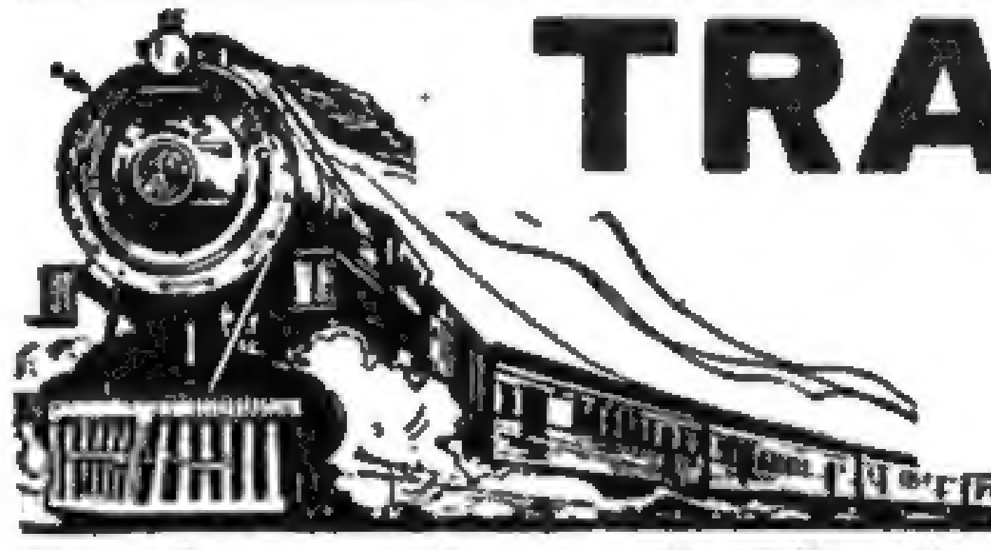

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Feb. 1st, 1928

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Volume 65
Number 4

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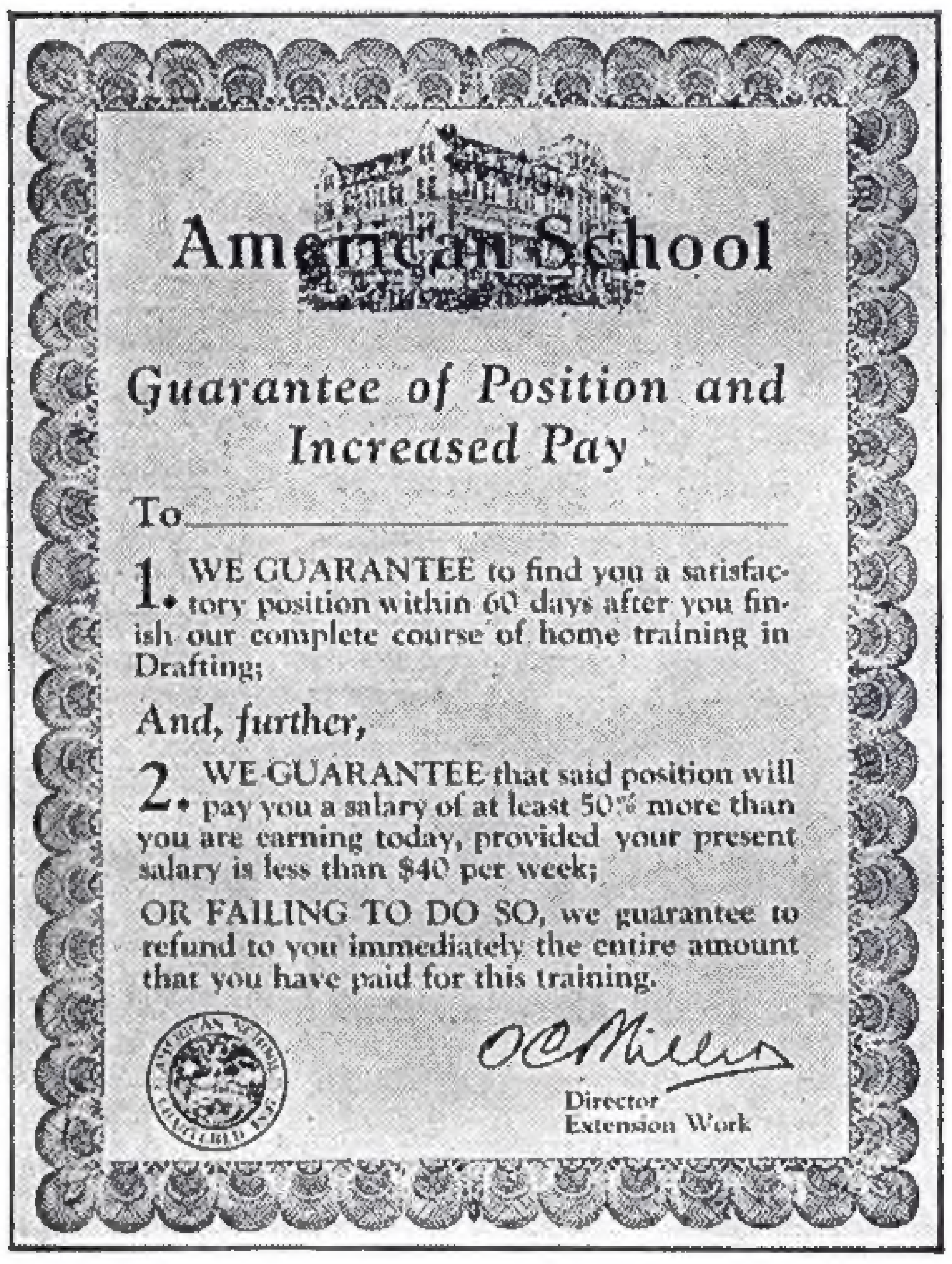

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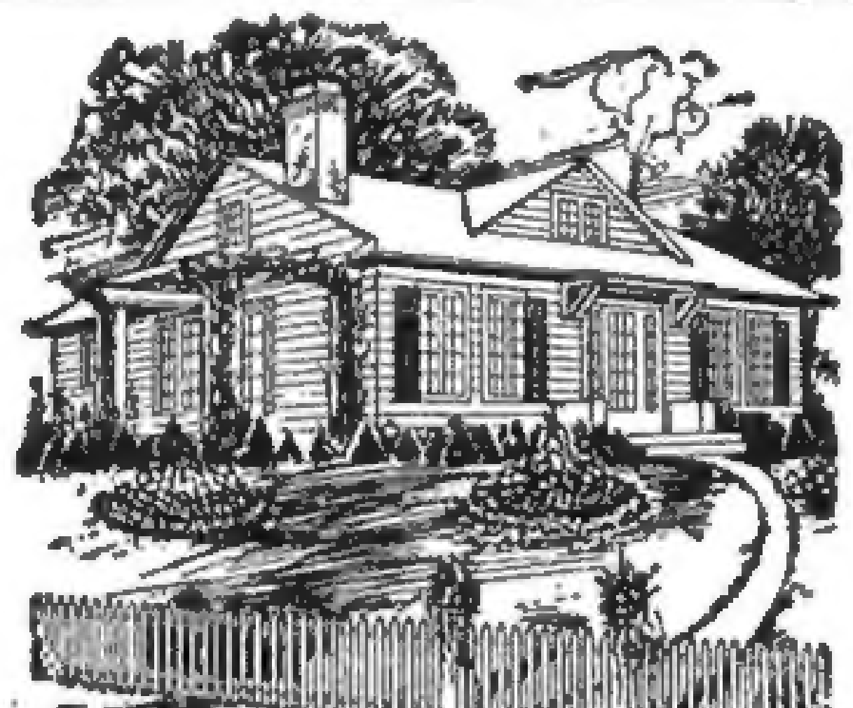

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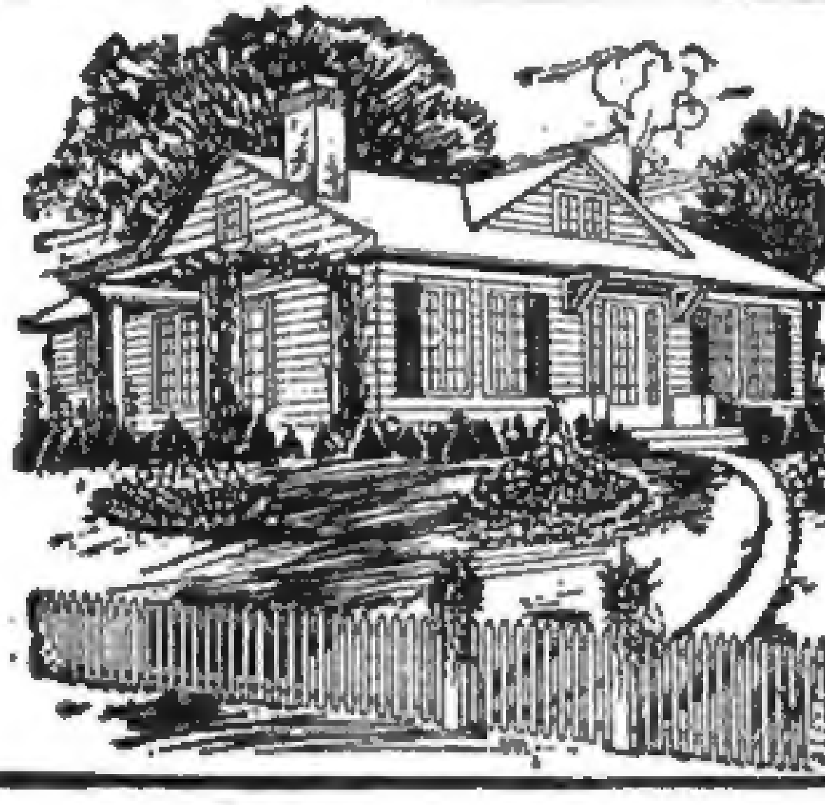

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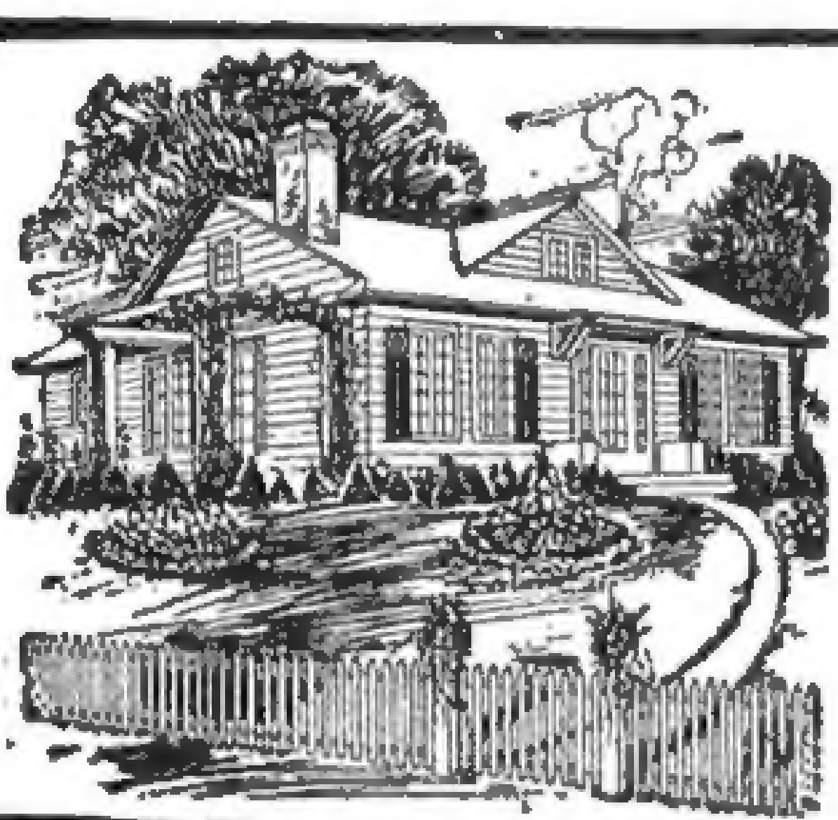

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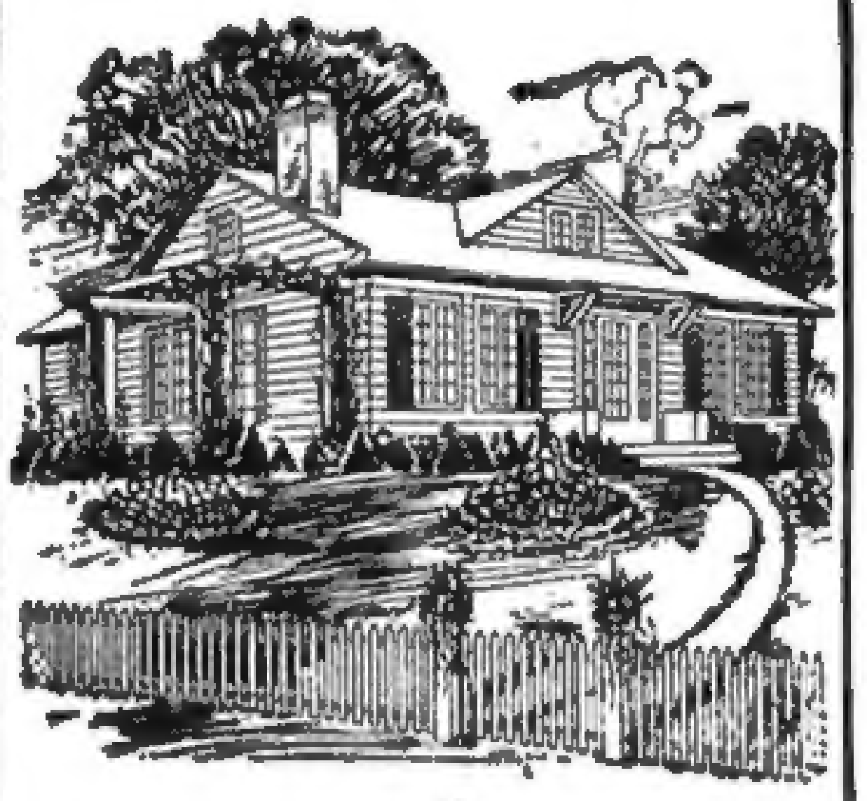

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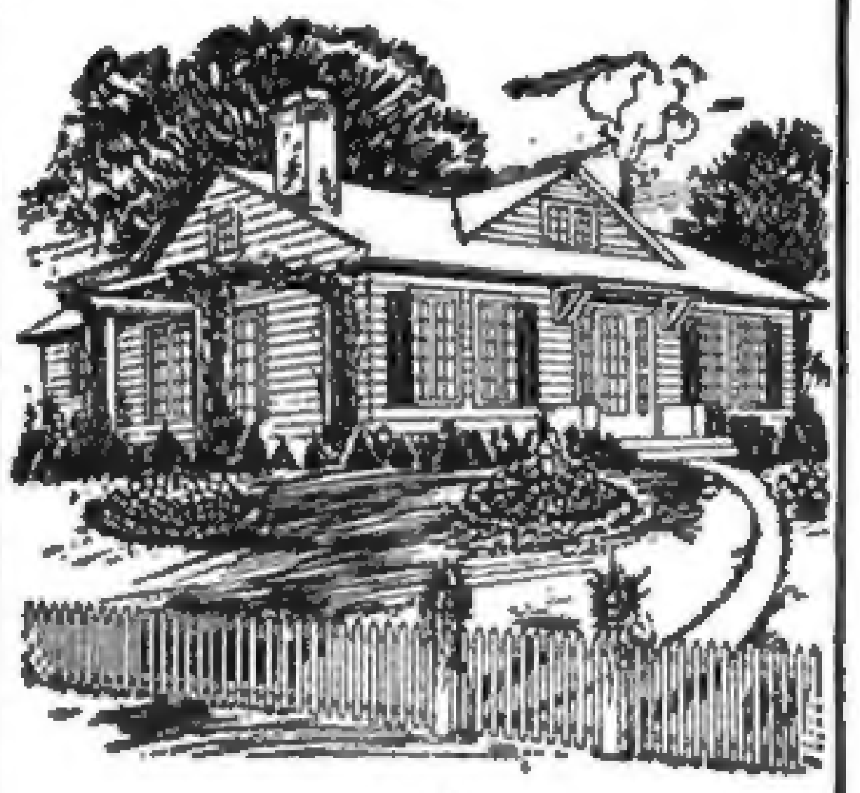

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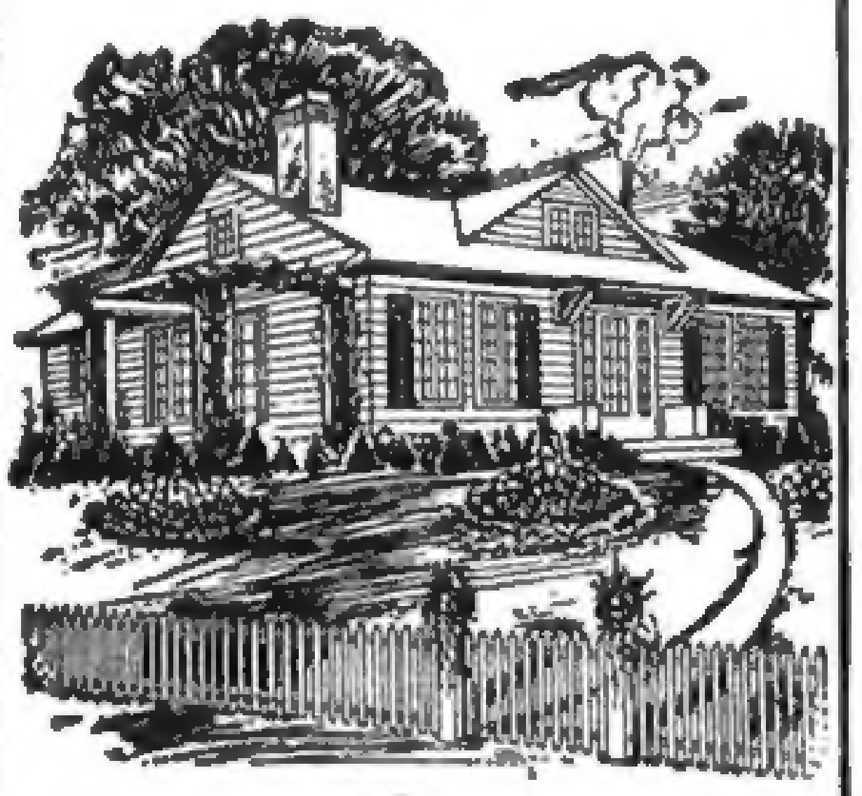

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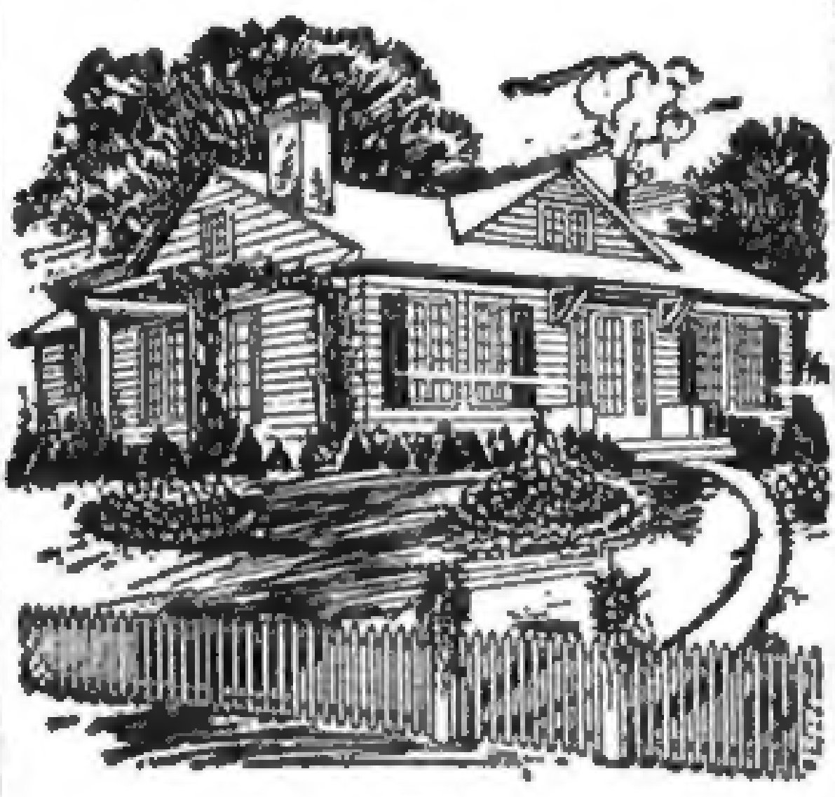

7

REWARD

Find the "One" House That Is Different From the Others—It's FREE

There are 14 six-room houses pictured here. To be sure they all look alike, but examine them closely. Thirteen of them are exactly alike, but one, and only one, is different. It isn't as easy as it looks. See if you can find the different one. It is going to be given away ABSOLUTELY FREE.

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You Cannot Lose Positively every one taking advantage of this opportunity is rewarded. Find the one house that is different from all the others and rush your name and address to me TODAY. A postal card will do, just say, "House No. — is different from all the others. Without any obligation please tell me how I can get this fine six-room house without one cent of cost to me."

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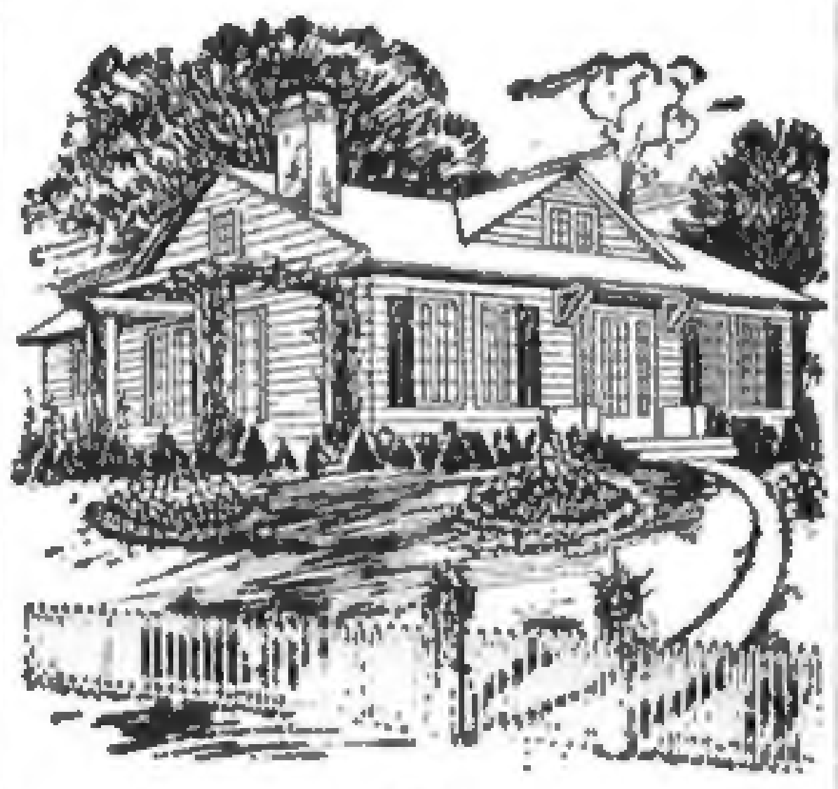

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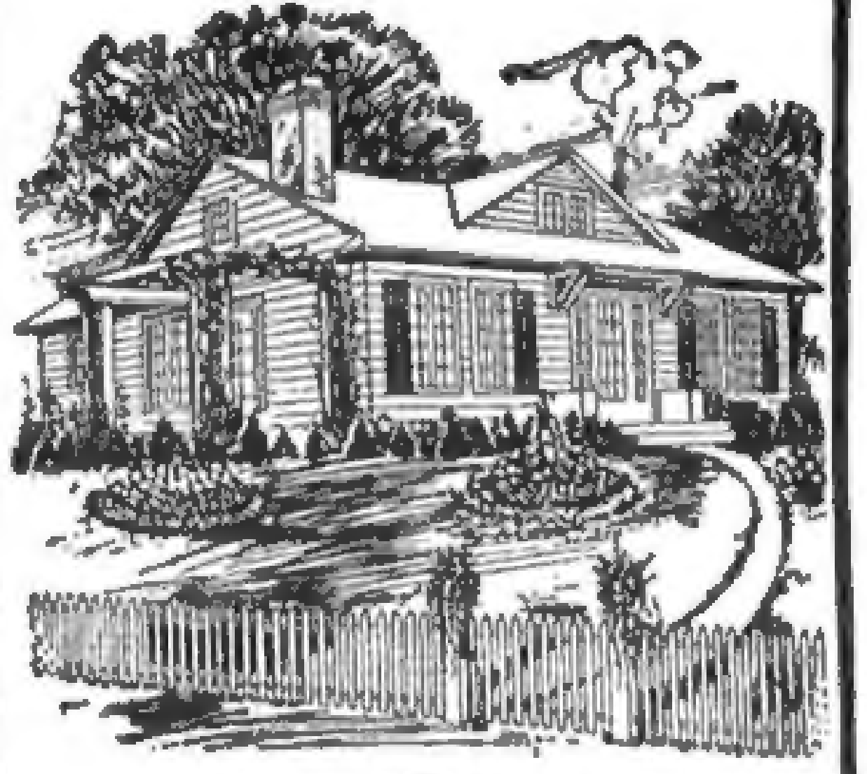

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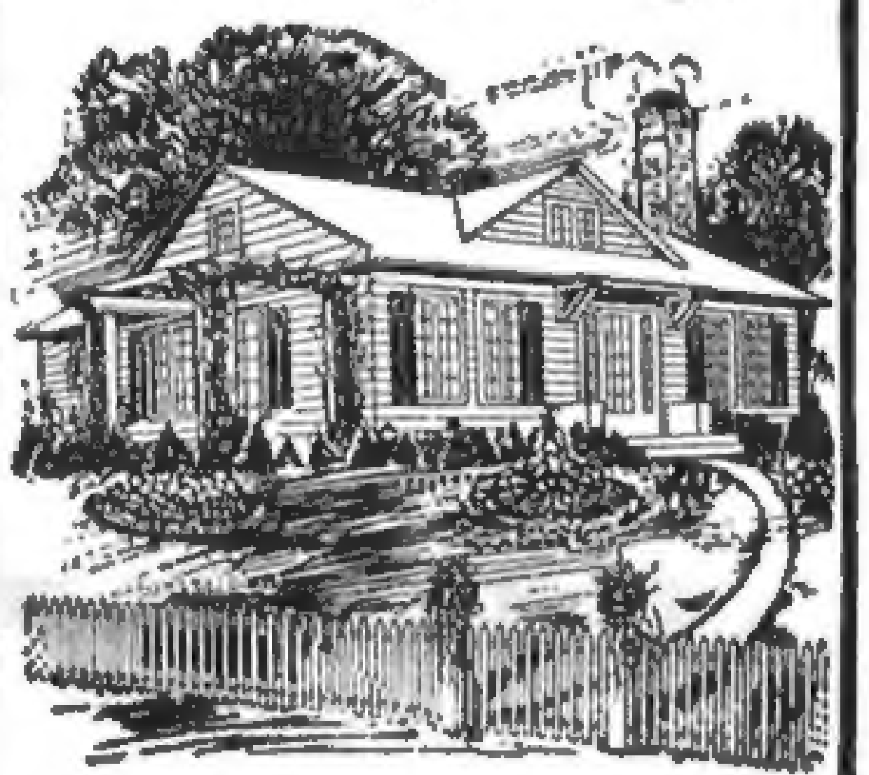

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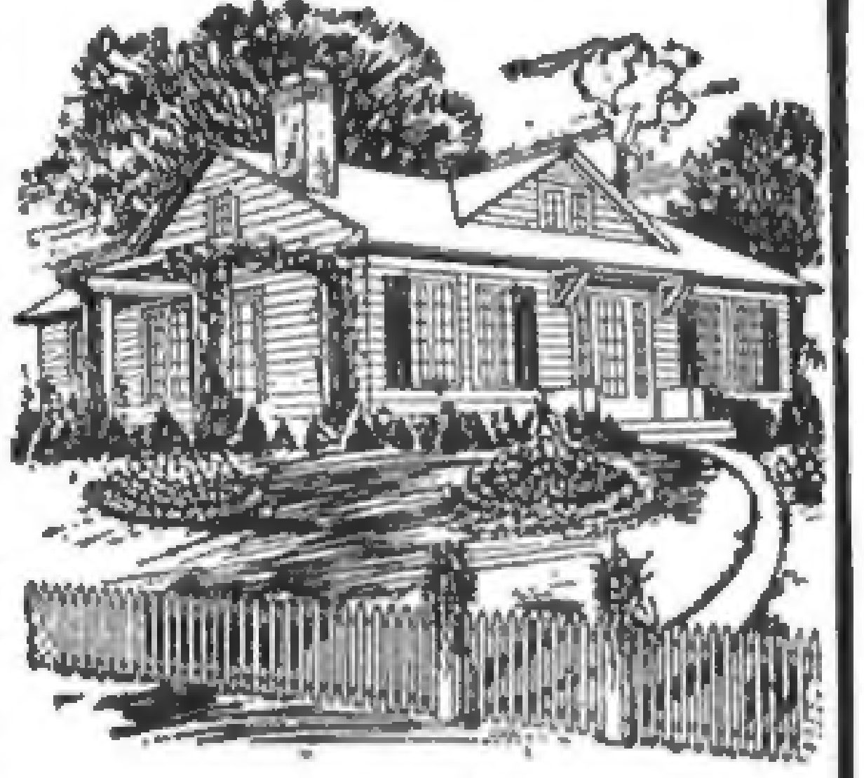

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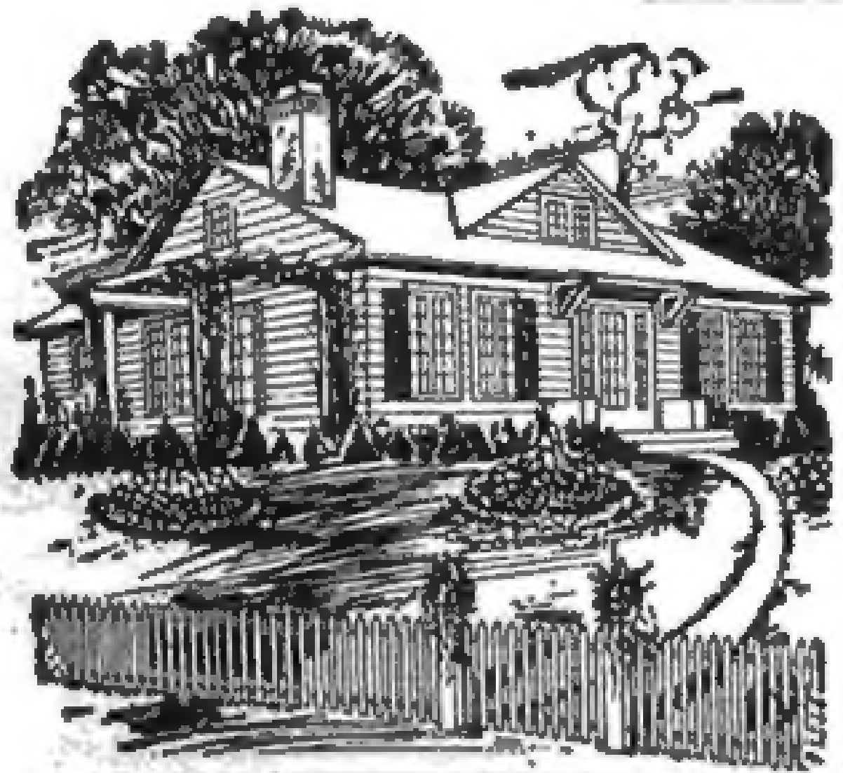

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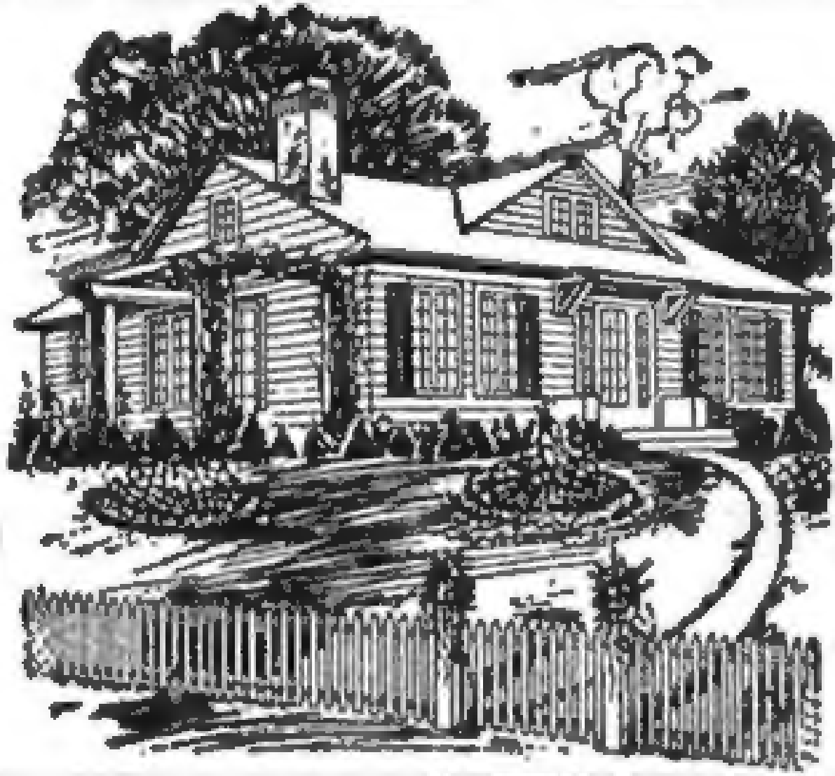

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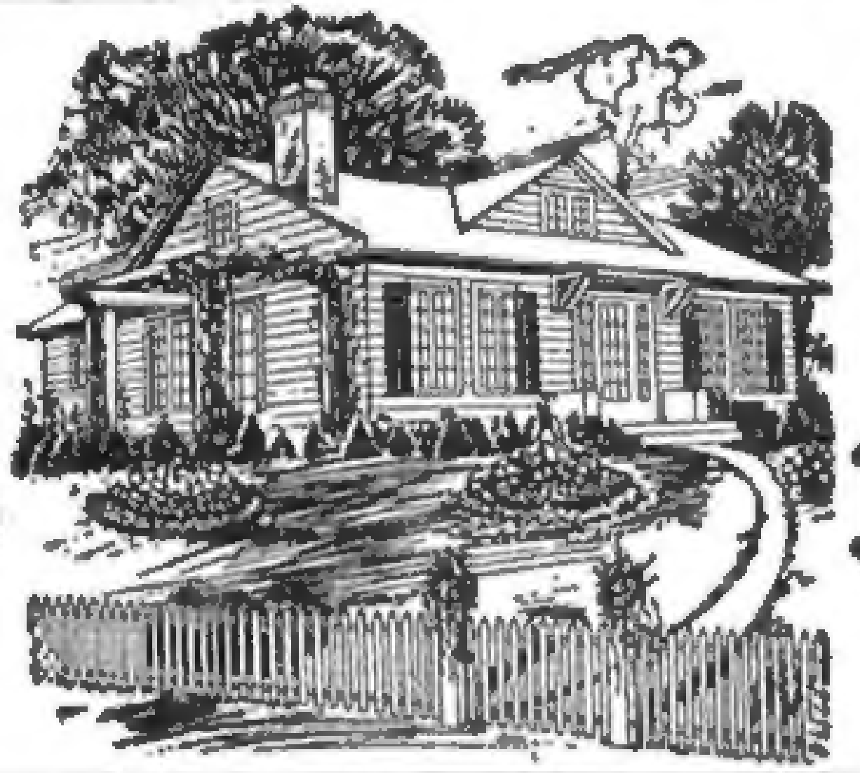

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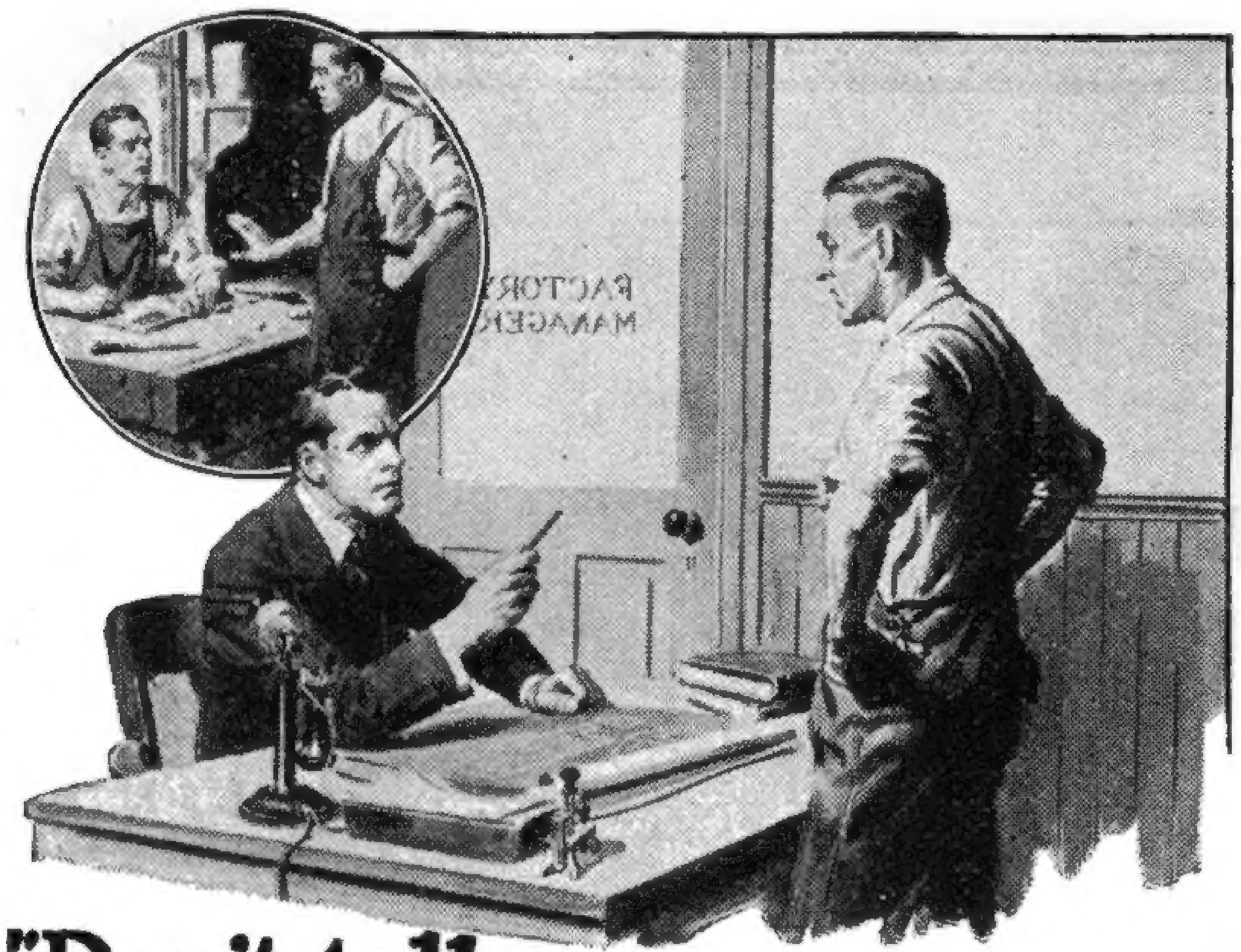

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"His Tail Between His Legs"

What most men would see if they could see themselves

MOST men are being whipped every day in the battle of life. Many have already reached the stage where they have **THEIR TAILS BETWEEN THEIR LEGS.**

They are afraid of everything and everybody. They live in a constant fear of being deprived of the pitiful existence they are leading. Vaguely they hope for **SOMETHING TO TURN UP** that will make them unafraid, courageous, independent.

While they hope vainly, they drift along, with no definite purpose, no definite plan, nothing ahead of them but old age. The scourgings of life do not help such men. In fact, the more lashes they receive at the hands of fate, the more **COWED** they become.

What becomes of these men? They are the wage slaves. They are the "little-business" slaves, the millions of clerks, storekeepers, bookkeepers, laborers, assistants, secretaries, salesmen. They are the millions who work and sweat and—**MAKE OTHERS RICH AND HAPPY!**

The pity of it is, nothing can **SHAKE THEM** out of their complacency. Nothing can stir them out of the mental rut into which they have sunk.

Their wives, too, quickly lose ambition and become slaves—slaves to their kitchens, slaves to their children, slaves to their husbands—slaves to their homes. And with such examples before them, what hope is there for their children **BUT TO GROW UP INTO SLAVERY.**

Some men, however, after years of cringing, turn on life. They **CHALLENGE** the whipper. They discover, perhaps to their own surprise, that it isn't so difficult as they imagined, **TO SET A HIGH GOAL**—and reach it! Only a few try—it is true—but that makes it easier for those who **DO** try.

The rest quit. They show a yellow streak as broad as their backs. They are through—and in their hearts they know it. Not that they are beyond help, but that they have acknowledged defeat, laid down their arms, stopped using their heads, and have simply said to life, "Now do with me as you will."

What about **YOU?** Are you ready to admit that you are through? Are you content to sit back and wait for something to turn up? Have you shown a yellow streak in **YOUR** Battle of Life? Are you satisfied to keep your wife and children—and yourself—enslaved? **ARE YOU AFRAID OF LIFE?**

Success is a simple thing to acquire when you know its formula. The first ingredient is a grain of **COURAGE.** The second is a dash of **AMBITION.** The third is an ounce of **MENTAL EFFORT.** Mix the whole with your God-given faculties and no power on earth can keep you from your desires, be they what they may.

Most people actually use about **ONE-TENTH** of their brain capacity. It is as if they were deliberately trying to remain twelve years old mentally. They do not profit by the experience they have gained, nor by the experience of others.

You can develop these God-given faculties by yourself—without outside help; or you can do as **SIX HUNDRED AND FIFTY THOUSAND** other people have done—study Pelmanism.

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Judge Ben B. Lindsey, Founder of the Juvenile Court, Denver.
Sir Harry Lauder, Comedian.
W. L. George, Author.
Gen. Sir Frederick Maurice, Director of Military Operations, Imperial General Staff.
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Baroness Orczy, Author.
Prince Charles of Sweden.

—and others, of equal prominence, too numerous to mention here.

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If you are made of the stuff that isn't content to remain a slave—if you have taken your last whipping from life,—if you have a spark of **INDEPENDENCE** left in your soul, write for this free book. It tells you what Pelmanism is, **WHAT IT HAS DONE FOR OTHERS,** and what it can do for you.

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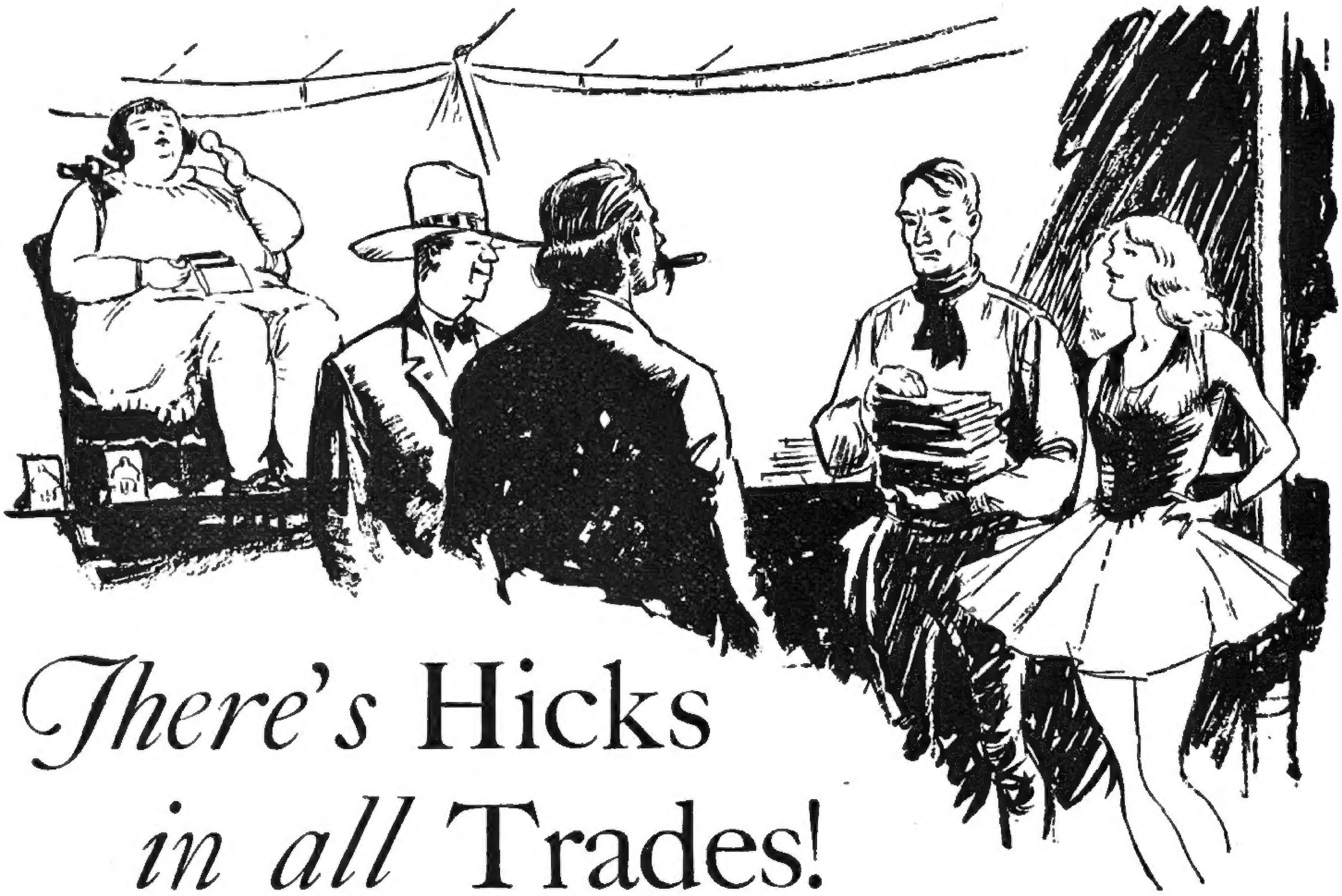

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Thomas Thursday writes a genuinely humorous story of our old friend "Doc" McKeezick and his hilarious experiences with Lulu La Belle, the Albino beauty, and all the other amusing folks who people the side shows. In the February EVERYBODY'S

AND THREE COMPLETE NOVELETTES

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A tale of the Ozarks
by J. E. GRINSTEAD

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Of Pearl fishing in Papua
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A Western story
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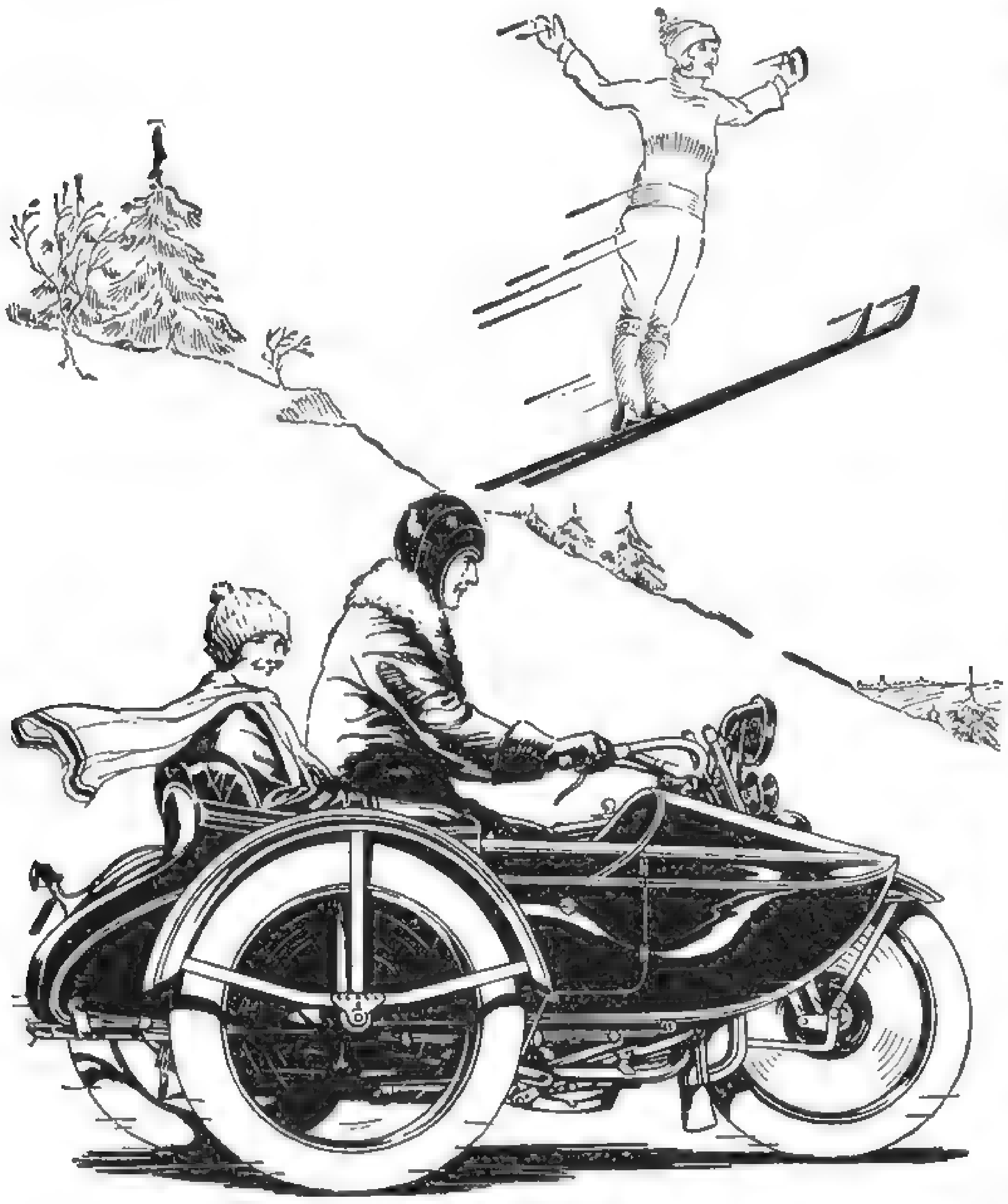

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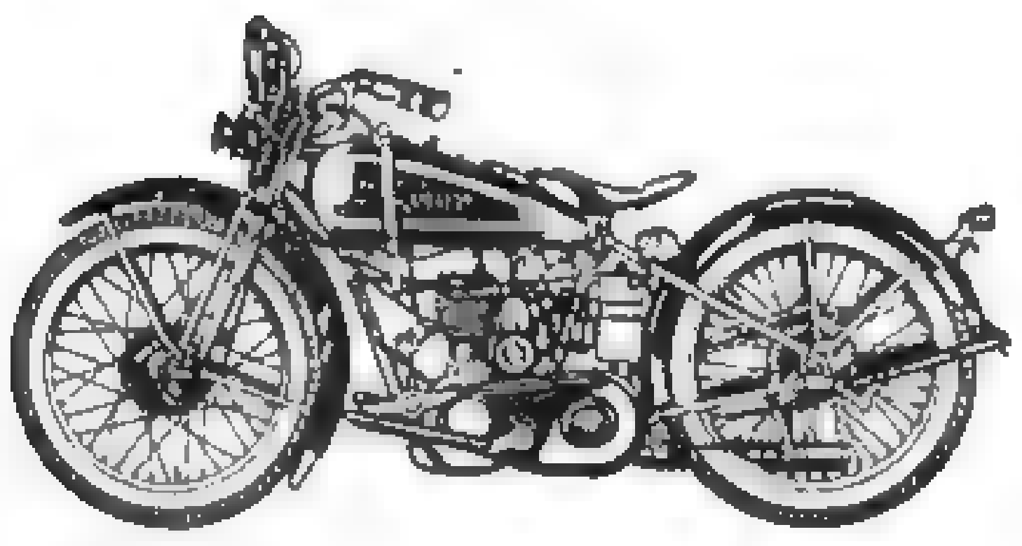

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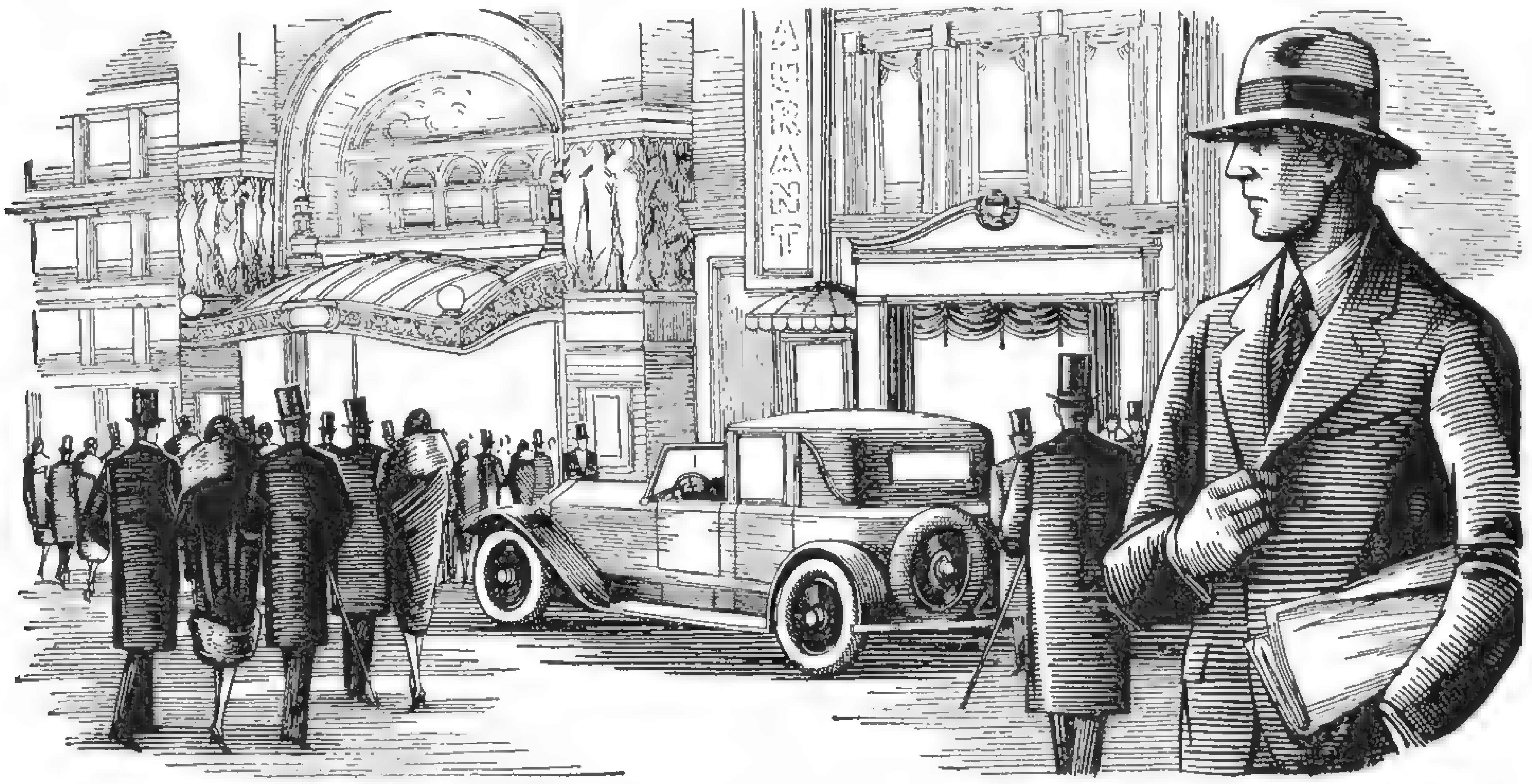

Always outside of things—that's where I was just twelve short months ago. I just didn't have the cash, that was all. No theatres, no parties, no good restaurants. No real enjoyment of life. I was just getting by, just existing. What a difference today! I drive my own car, have a good bank account, enjoy all the amusements I please.

I Couldn't Get The Good Things of Life

Then I Quit My Job and "Found" Myself!

HOW does a man go about making more money? If I asked myself that question once, I asked it a hundred times!

I know the answer now—you bet. I know the way good money is made, and I'm making it. Gone forever are the days of cheap shoes, cheap clothes, walking home to save carfare, pinching pennies to make my salary last from one pay-day to the next one. I own one of the finest Radio stores you ever saw, and I get almost all the Radio service and repair work in town. The other Radio dealers send their hard jobs to me, so you can see how I stand in my line.

But—it's just a year ago that I was a poorly-paid clerk. I was struggling along on a starvation salary, until by accident my eyes were opened and I saw just what was the matter with me. Here's the story of just how it happened.

ONE of the big moments of my life had come. I had just popped the fatal question, and Louise said "Yes!"

Louise wanted to go in and tell her father about it right away, so we did. He sort of grunted when we told him the news, and asked Louise to leave us alone. And my heart began to sink as I looked at his face.

"So you and Louise have decided to get married," he said to me when we were alone. "Well, Bill, just listen to me. I've watched you often here at the house with Louise and I think you are a pretty good, upstanding young fellow. I knew your father and mother, and you've always had a good reputation here, too. But just let me ask you just one question—how much do you make?"

"Twenty-eight a week," I told him.

He didn't say a word—just wrote it down on a piece of paper.

"Have you any prospects of a better job or a good raise sometime soon?" he asked.

"No, sir, I can't honestly say that I have." I admitted. "I'm looking for something better all the time, though."

"Looking, eh? How do you go about it?"

Well, that question stopped me.

How did I? I was willing to take a better job if I saw the chance all right, but I certainly had laid no plans to make such a job for myself. When he saw my confusion he grunted. "I thought so," he said, then he held up some figures he'd been scribbling at.

"I've just been figuring out your family budget, Bill, for a salary of twenty-eight a week I've figured it several ways, so you can take your pick of the one you like best. Here's Budget No. 1. I figure you can afford a very small unfurnished apartment, make your payments on enough plain, inexpensive furniture to fix such an apartment up, pay your electricity, gas and water bills, buy just about one modest outfit of clothes for both of you once a year, and save three dollars a week for sickness, insurance and emergencies. But you can't eat. And you'll have to go without amusements until you can get a good substantial raise in salary."

I began to turn red as fire.

"That budget isn't so good after all," he said, glancing at me, "maybe Budget No. 2 will sound better—"

"That's enough, Mr. Sullivan," I said. "Have a heart. I can see things pretty clearly now, things I was kidding myself about before. Let me go home and think this over." And home I went, my mind in a whirl.

AT HOME I turned the problem over and over in my mind. I'd popped the question at Louise on impulse, without thinking it out. Everything Mr. Sullivan had said was gospel truth. I couldn't see anything to do, any way to turn. But I had to have more money.

I began to thumb the pages of a magazine which lay on the table beside me. Suddenly an advertisement seemed almost to leap out at my eyes, an advertisement telling of big opportunities for trained men to succeed in the great new Radio field. With the advertisement was a coupon offering a big free book full of information. I sent the coupon in, and in a few days received a handsome 64-page book, printed in two colors, telling all about the opportunities in the Radio field and how a man can prepare quickly and easily at home to take advantage of these opportunities. I read the book carefully, and when I finished it I made my decision.

What's happened in the twelve months since that day seems almost like a dream to me now. For ten of those twelve months, I've had a Radio business of my own! At first, of course, I started it as a little proposition on the side, under the guidance of the National Radio Institute, the institution that gave me my Radio training. It wasn't long before I was getting so much to do in the Radio line that I quit my measley little clerical job and devoted my full time to my Radio business.

Since that time I've gone right on up, always under the watchful guidance of my friends at the National Radio Institute. They would have given me just as much help, too, if I had wanted to follow some other line of Radio besides building my own retail business, such as broadcasting, manufacturing, experimenting, sea operating, or any one of the score of lines they prepare you for. And to think that until that day I sent for their eye-opening book, I'd been wailing "I never had a chance!"

Now, I'm making real money. Louise and I have been married six months, and there wasn't any kidding about budgets by Mr. Sullivan when we stepped off, either. I'll bet that today I make more money than the old boy himself.

Here's a real tip. You may not be as bad off as I was. But, think it over—are you satisfied? Are you making enough money, at work that you like? Would you sign a contract to stay where you are now for the next ten years, making the same money? If not, you'd better be doing something about it instead of drifting.

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1928

Vol. LXV No. 4

Anthony M. Rud
EDITOR

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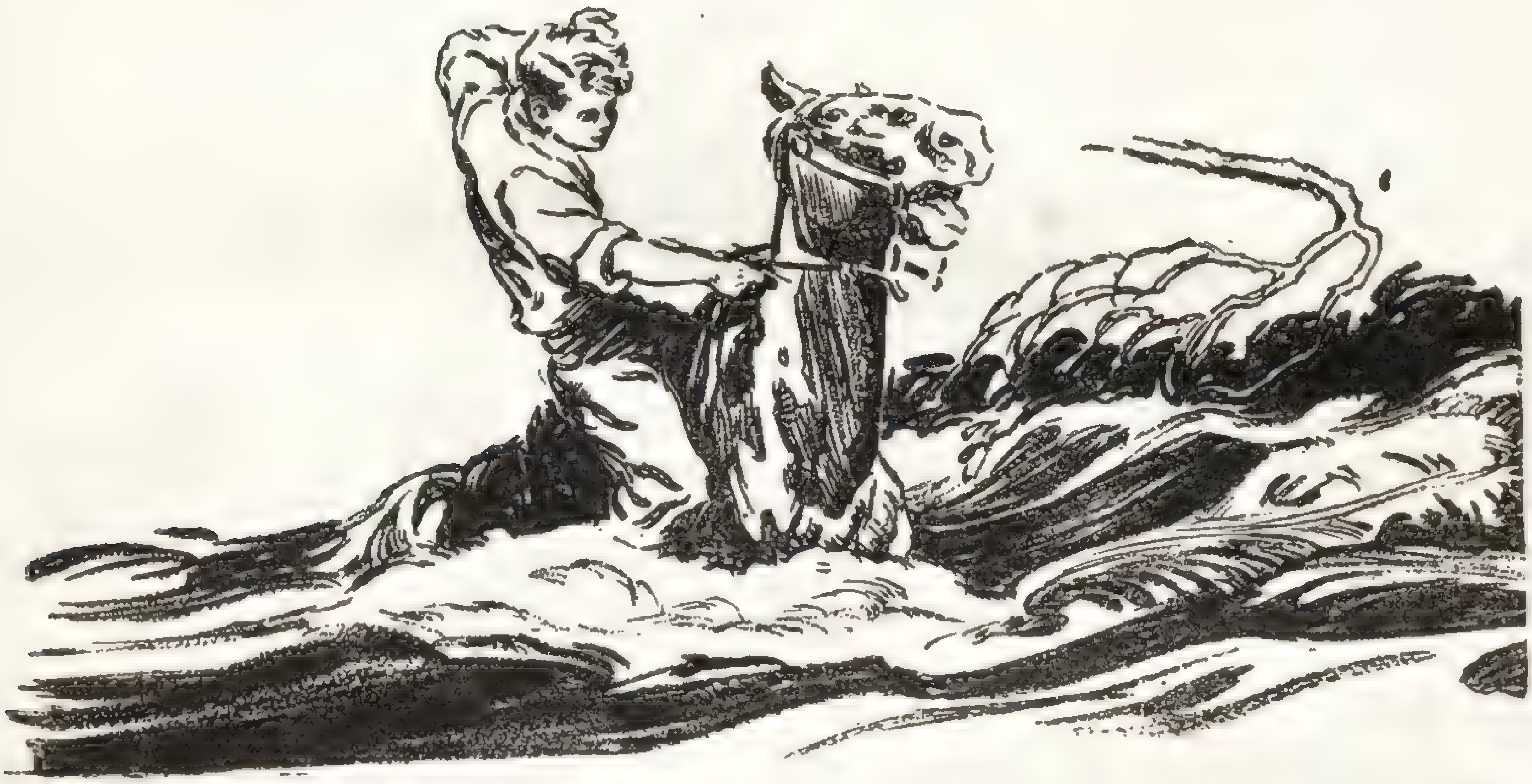
Beginning

A NOVEL OF THE DAYS WHEN ARIZONA WAS YOUNG

Texas Man



BOONE SIBLEY was the issue of his ancestry and of the circumstances which nurtured him. No other time or place, no less elementary conditions of life, could have begot in him the peculiar individual force which sent him striding on his stark way through a pack of wolves snarling and snapping at him to drag him down. No civilization could have produced him but that frontier world of contrasts, at once so hard and so kind, so tragic and so indomitably gay. Only the strong survived. That Boone became notable in it connotes in him ruthless efficiency, deadly skill and a nerve that never faltered.

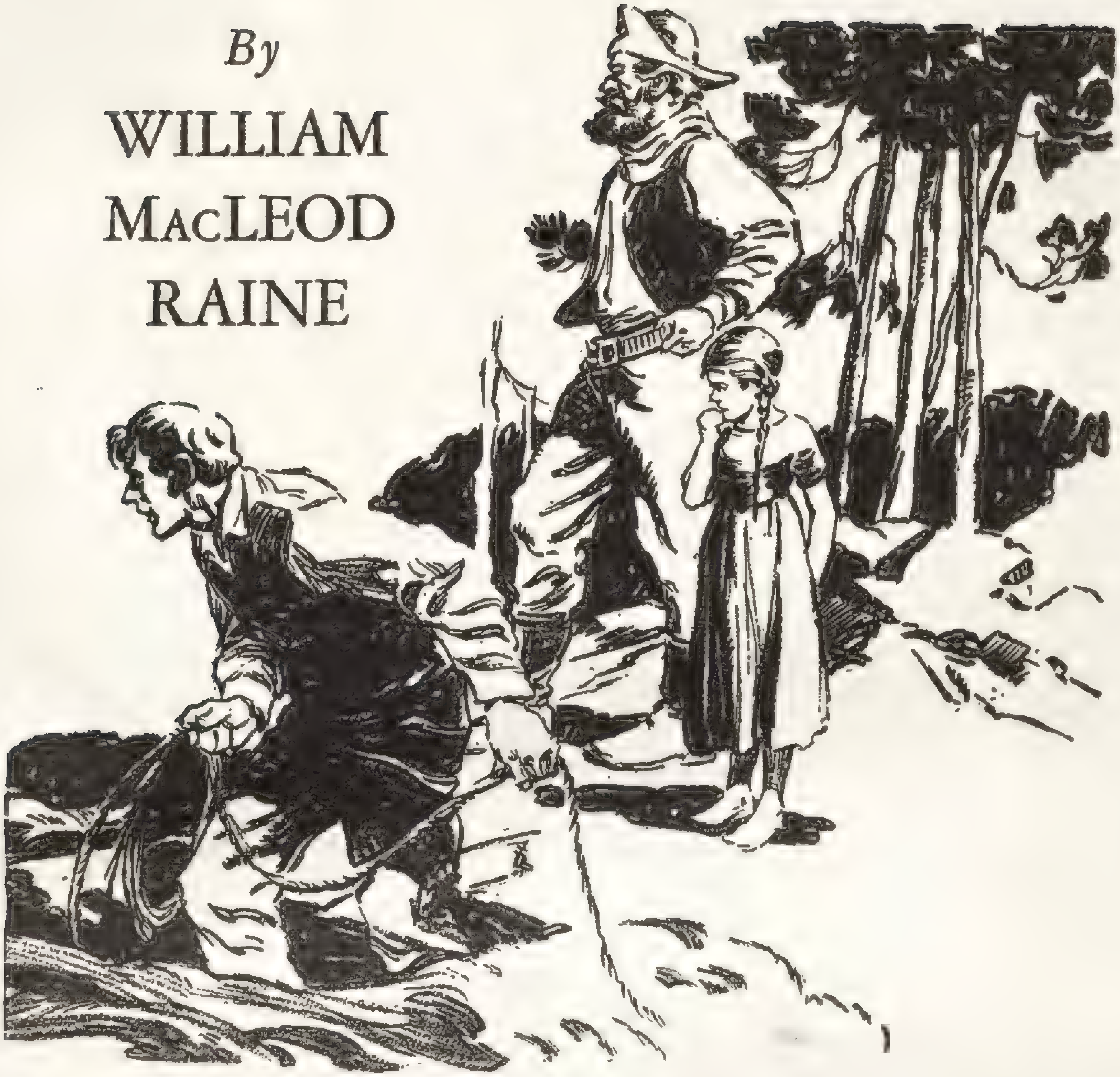
He was born in Parker County, Texas, on the east bank of the Brazos. He first opened his eyes in a log cabin of one room, a cabin with a puncheon floor, a door of clapboards chinked with mud, and a stick and dirt chimney.

The furniture was as rough as the house. In the room were a homemade bench and stools, a table with a top the planks of which had been shaved by a drawing-knife. His mother lay on a one-legged bedstead, the side and end of which were mortised in the wall. The cooking utensils consisted of a three-legged skillet, a Dutch oven, a dinner pot, a tea kettle, an iron shovel and some pothooks. Dipped candles stuck in square blocks of wood, a hole bored to fit the end, lighted the house after dark.

For James and Callie Sibley were

By

WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE



pioneers. Not at all for adventure, not with any love of heroics, but merely in the hope of bettering their condition, they had pushed beyond the fringe of farthest settlement into the Indian country. They took their lives in their hands. The oxen yoked to their covered wagon trod the uncharted wilderness. His rifle shot the game that kept them alive. His ax chopped the trees for their cabin. She made his clothes and her own, even to her husband's cap of deerskin with the hair side out.

One of Boone's earliest memories was of walking with his mother to the nearest neighbor, more than a mile away, to borrow fire. Matches on the Brazos were almost unknown. In every house were a piece of punk and a flint rock.

Callie was a splendid type of pioneer woman, deep-bosomed, active, the glow of health in her cheeks. There was nothing with which she could not cope. Beside her husband and a companion she fought Indians, a rifle in her hands. She could treat a wound as deftly as she baked bread. Boone remembered her as a woman of smiles, tender, firm, filled with courage, a worthy helpmate to such a man as his father.

In James Sibley had been a quiet force that made for leadership. He was slow spoken, gentle of voice, well poised, influential because of his character. He would do, his neighbors said, "to ride the river with."

Another of the lad's early recollections had to do with two young women who stayed for a week or two at the Sibley's house. Why they were there, who they were, he could not recall. But it was long before he could forgive them. They wanted to kiss him. He fled, resisted, fought to the bitter end, but was defeated ignominiously. It is possible that the genesis of his later attitude toward women may be found in this experience.

Boone was brought up in a world of work. His three older brothers built fences, herded cattle or broke the prairie behind two yoke of oxen hitched to a turn plow. They carried rifles with them into the fields as a protection against the Comanches. While still in their early teens they helped their father stand off a bunch of ten roving raiders.

There were no girls in the family; therefore it fell to Boone to help his mother. He was torn between conflicting impulses. His mother he loved devotedly, but while he churned, wiped dishes or milked the cows the outraged manhood in his little body was in rebellion. This was woman's work. The shame of it abased him. He lived in continual dread lest some neighbor see him at his tasks and laugh at him.

On wash day the steaming clothes were dipped out of a boiler and put on a block made for the purpose. With a battling stick Boone beat the dirt out of them, one hand turning the sopping mass occasionally, the while his mother rubbed the garments after he had finished.

This was bad enough, but the quilting was almost more than he could bear. For weary hours he had to hand the threads through the harness of the loom. One day two young cowboys dropped in, caught him at it and thoughtlessly made fun of him. They called him Miss Sallie.

Boone ran away that night. He took with him a big Sharp's rifle almost as long as himself. It was characteristic of the little fellow that he did not turn back toward Weatherford and civilization but pushed north, hoping to get across the Brazos into Palo Pinto. An outfit of buffalo hunters were on the far side of the river. They had stopped at his father's place overnight and one of them had asked Boone as a joke if he would go with them. He meant to join them now if he could.

The river was high for the time of year. The water was muddy and running fast. In the night it looked a fearsome adventure to attempt the crossing. He decided to ride farther up the stream on the lookout for a shallower place.

The boy had never been out alone so late at night. He had to steel his stout heart against the fears that rose in him. The Indians might be all around him. Every clump of mesquite hid one or more, to his excited fancy. The whoop of a horn owl startled him. He pulled up, trembling with excitement. Boone knew that the Comanches, hunting horses at night, would keep in touch with each other by imitating these night birds. But he knew, too, that the sound of the horn owl carried no echo; that of the Indian's call did. He waited, unmoving, till the hoot rang out again. There was no echo. Once more he dared to breathe as he put his pony in motion.

THE FIRST gray light of day was sifting into the sky when he crossed a pecan bayou and came to a ford. Very tired and sleepy, he tied the pony and sat down on the edge of the stream to wait until it was lighter. His eyes closed, fluttered open, drooped again. He was awakened by the sun's rays streaming into his face.

Boone sat up, startled. He must have been asleep for hours. The paint pony stood patiently where he had left it.

Thoughts of his mother, of the home, of the friendly family, flooded the youngster's mind. He had to choke down a lump in his throat. For he was both heartsick and hungry. But he did not for an instant waver. He pulled himself into the saddle and put the pinto into the stream. As he rode down he noticed wheel tracks. Very recently a wagon had crossed, probably within the past twenty-four hours. This was encouraging. If a wagon had made the ford he could do it on horseback.

The pony sank deeper into the current as it moved forward. The swift water rose to its belly. Presently the hoofs of the horse were swept from the ground and it was swimming. In a moment Boone knew that his life was at hazard. The river must have risen during the night.

Pluckily the pinto breasted the waters. The stretch of swift, deep current was not wide, but as the pony fought to make headway the youngster knew that the animal was not gaining. Its strength began to fail before the pressure of the pounding flood. The bank of the river in front of the boy seemed to slide up.

Boone heard a shout. The loop of a rope snaked forward and dropped over his shoulders. He felt himself snatched out of the saddle and swept away. The waters swirled above his head. He was under the surface strangling for breath. With a jerk the rope brought him up, dragged him into shallower water. Sputtering and gasping, he was hauled ashore.

For a few moments he must have been unconscious. Out of a haze a voice came to him.

"Came mighty nigh not cuttin' it."

A second voice answered.

"The little skeezicks stuck to his rifle like death to a nigger's heel."

The boy opened his eyes. A bearded man knelt beside him. He was loosening a wet rope from the little fellow's body. A younger man, wet to the waist, had hold of the other end of the rope. Beside him, staring down at Boone, was a long-legged, red-headed little girl.

She shrilled out in a burst of excitement—

"He's openin' his eyes, pappy."

"Sure is, Til," the older man assented.

Gravely the boy looked from one to another.

"Did Pinto make it?" he asked.

"Got out thirty- forty rods lower down. He's sure whipped out though. Boy, howcome you to tackle the river? Where are yore folks anyhow?"

"He's the teentiest li'l thing," the girl cried.

She was not very large herself, perhaps seven or eight years old. Boone looked at her resentfully. "I'm not," he denied flatly.

"How old are you?" asked her father.

"Eleven, comin' grass."

"Where you from?"

"From the yon side the river," Boone answered after a moment of deliberation. He had no intention of telling too much.

"Where was you aimin' to go?"

"To Wayne Lemley's buffalo camp."

The men stared at this amazing child. He had got up and was wringing water out of his coonskin cap.

"Not alone?" one of the men said.

Boone looked at him with dignity.

"I'm not keerin' for company, seh."

"You'd go alone, right through the Injun country?"

"I aim to travel mostly at night."

The older man scratched his sandy hair.

"He sure whips me."

His son grinned.

"Looks like a motherless calf, but he has got spunk." Of Boone he asked a question. "Is yore paw at this buffalo camp?"

"No, seh."

"Who then?"

"I done told you. It's Wayne Lemley's camp."

"Now see here, boy, you got no business here all by yourself. It ain't safe. Where would you have been right now if I hadn't snaked you outa the Brazos?"

"Maybe I would have got out with Pinto; maybe not. I'm right much obleeged to you."

In so small a chap his imperturbability was surprising. His reserve repulsed all attacks upon his incapacity to look after himself.

The little girl offered a constructive suggestion.

"Well, anyhow he'll eat breakfast with us, pappy."

The bearded man led the way to the covered wagon.

"Come on, son. It's ready now."

"I've got yore company, seh," Boone answered with quaint courtesy.

THE BREAKFAST consisted of coffee, flapjacks and pemmican, but the boy would not eat until he had reclaimed and hobbled the pinto. This done, he sat on his heels at the tail of the wagon and ate heartily. The child sat opposite and stared at him while he satisfied his hunger.

The camper introduced himself and family.

"Our name is McLennon. My son's name is Hugh. The little girl is Tilatha."

"I'm Boone Sibley," the guest responded.

"Where are yore folks?"

"Down the river a ways."

"How come they to let you get so far from home?"

"I'm headin' for the buffalo camp."

"I heerd you the fust time, son. But I don't reckon you better try it. If I was you I'd cut dirt for yore folks' place. We'll see you acrost the river."

"I don't aim to go acrost the river," the boy said doggedly.

"Better run back, son. Have you got a father and a mother?"

"Yes, seh."

"Had some trouble with them maybe. They whopped you, likely."

"No, seh. My father an' mother are the best folks in the world," Boone answered stoutly.

"Well, you go home to them. Cain't have you runnin' around thisaway."

"He's too li'l, ain't he, pappy?" Tilatha volunteered complacently.

Boone looked at her and flushed. He had no use for girls anyhow.

"I don't reckon it's none of yore business, is it?" he demanded.

Her eyes flashed.

"You're a nasty li'l boy. Tha's what you are," she countered swiftly.

"There—there! Don't you get red haided, Til," her father chided. "I expect Boone is right. It ain't yore put-in. Little girls had orta speak when they are spoke to."

"He's only a li'l boy," she protested. "Only he thinks he's so big."

"Shet yore mouth, child," McLennon chided. "Cain't you-all behave like a little lady."

She subsided, externally, but her eyes flamed defiance at the boy. Later when her father's attention had been withdrawn for a moment, she spat her feeling out in words.

"'Bout *so* big," she hissed, measuring a distance on her forefinger with the adjoining thumb.

Boone looked at her, then looked away. After all she was only a girl. Why let himself get annoyed? He had, even at this age, a capacity for silence.

CHAPTER II

ACROSS PALO PINTO

BOONE did not have with him a cent, but he would not have been able to use money if he had had any. In the pioneer Southwest the settlers did not go in debt, but work and supplies were often used as a medium of exchange instead of coin. He was beyond the farthest settlement, and in this wilderness there was nothing to sell. To offer to pay for a meal or a night's lodging would have been an insult. These were courtesies due every chance comer.

After breakfast he rose and thanked his host, as one man to another.

"Much obleeged, Mr. McLennon. I reckon I'll be joggin' on."

Father and son exchanged looks.

"No need to push on yore reins," the older man drawled. "You're aimin' to travel nights, you say. Rest yore saddle and stick around with us awhile. Our stock is some gaunted. Feed is good here. We won't break camp for a day or two."

The boy considered this. It would be safer to stay till dark. He might meet a band of Comanches and that would not be so good. On the other hand, there was always the chance that his father or one of his brothers might arrive and ignominiously take him home. Already no doubt they were casting over the country on a search for him. If they should find his trail they might be here within a few hours.

"I'll shove on," he said.

McLennon shook his head.

"Better not. We cut Injun sign yesterday. Maybe they're peaceable hunters and maybe they're not. Cain't ever tell. Give 'em a chance to get outa the neighborhood."

"I'll watch keerful."

"No, son. Not for a while. If anything happened to you I couldn't forgive myself."

"There ain't anything gonna happen to me."

"Not as long as you stay here. The camp is yours. Make yoreself to home. You and Til can play together."

Boone flushed angrily. They intended to detain him. He saw that. He resented this infringement on his individuality, but he knew that protest would be of no avail. It would be better to pretend to accept their decision, to assume that he was staying of his own free will. Unwittingly the mover had added to injury insult. Boone did not play with little girls. He wanted to say so indignantly, but it seemed to him more dignified to ignore the suggestion.

He busied himself cleaning his rifle. This had to be done anyhow, to avoid the chance of rust from the wetting it had received. Tilatha sat down on her heels and watched him. He paid no attention to her. Perhaps this did not please her. At any rate she fired at him a verbal barb.

"Pappy won't let you go, 'cause you're so teeny."

Boone squinted into the barrel of the gun. He was furious, but he did not want to give her the satisfaction of letting her know. Apparently she was not on the map for him.

"My, you'll get a nawful whoppin' when yore pop comes," she continued.

This was altogether likely, but Boone did not care to hear prophecies on that subject. He finished cleaning the rifle and started to go toward the wagon to return a borrowed rag. Tilatha pretended to think that he was trying to escape. She shrieked for her father.

"Pap—pap, he's fixin' to run away!"

At once Boone lost what was left of his religion.

"Don't you *ever* mind yore own doggone business?" he cried. "'F I was yore pop I'd sure drown you."

"He's swearin' at me, pappy," she screamed.

Hugh sauntered up. He was used to his sister's little ways.

"Shet up, Til, or I'll wear you to a frazzle. Dad's gone fishin'."

"You won't either. If you dass touch me—"

Hugh did not discuss the subject. He picked her up, deposited her in an empty flour barrel, put the lid on partially and sat on it.

"You'll stay right there till you quit yelpin'," he informed her.

Miss Tilatha in turn threatened, wept and promised amendment. When her brother thought her sufficiently subdued he allowed her to return to society. She came back chastened and evidently rather proud of herself.

"I'm a nawful bad girl sometimes. Pappy says I'm a limb," she confided to Boone.

"What are you allowin' to do at the buffalo camp?" Hugh asked the boy.

"Kill 'em, skin 'em, salt 'em down."

Hugh suppressed a grin. This midget spoke as though he were of mature age. Even on the frontier, where circumstances develop men young, Boone would hardly pass as an adult. Hugh himself was nineteen, and he did not consider that he had been grown up more than two years.

"Can you handle that cannon you carry?" he asked, pointing at the rifle.

"I've made out to kill two-three deer, an antelope an' se-ve-re-al turkeys with it," Boone answered with dignity.

"Deer an' turkey ain't buffalo."

"No. Buffaloes are bigger an' easier to hit."

True to her sex, Tilatha made an about-face shamelessly.

"Bet yore boots Boone could kill a buffalo 'f he wanted to."

"Little girls don't bet their boots," reproved Hugh.

Tilatha exonerated herself with characteristic logic.

"I wasn't bettin' *my* boots. I was bettin' *yore* boots." She added, not without malice, " 'N if you don't stir yore stumps you'll lose the mules too. They've strayed clear over the hill."

Her brother turned on his elbow and took one look. The mules were out of sight. It would not do to let them get too far away, for there was always the possibility that Indians might stampede them. He rose and moved away to drive back the straying animals.

Before he had gone a dozen yards Tilatha was whispering eagerly to Boone.

"Now's yore chance. Saddle up an' ride lickety split."

Boone looked at her, astonished. Less than half an hour ago she had been in battle drawn with him. Now she seemed to be on his side. He half suspected treachery, and yet . . .

"Hurry, slowpoke," she urged. "Ain't you got no sense a-tall?"

The boy rose to swift action. He caught the hobbled pony, brought it back to camp and with difficulty got the heavy saddle on its back. One of the skirts was doubled under. He pulled this out and cinched the girths of the double rigged Brazos.

She watched him, a forefinger pressed against her lower lip. Now that he was going she had discovered that she did not want him to go.

"Oh, Boone, maybe the Injuns will get you," she wailed.

"They will *not*," he answered promptly, preparing to mount.

She sidled closer.

"But they might. 'F I never see you again, Boone?"

The boy was not sentimentalizing the situation. He did not care whether he ever saw her or not. But since she had had a change of heart he did not want to be impolite.

"S' long," he said, reaching for the horn and the cantle.

She took advantage of his distraction to throw her arms tightly around his neck and kiss the nearest cheek. Furiously embarrassed, Boone pushed her from him, glared at her a fraction of a second and dragged himself to the saddle seat. He dug his heels into the sides of the pony and it started at a lope.

Tilatha flung after him her defiance.

"You're a nasty, horrid li'l boy, 'n I knew it all the time."

He did not look back. The shame of what had taken place burned him up. To be kissed by a girl! Bah! What was the matter with them anyhow? Why couldn't they leave a fellow alone?

Boone caught sight of the mover and veered to the right. He paid no attention to the camper's shout for him to stop. The man tried to head him off, but the youngster put his pony at full speed. McLennon stopped running.

Out of sight beyond the next rise, Boone began working away from the river. They might pursue him, and he wanted to be hidden deep among the land waves that rolled westward. All day he traveled, guiding his course by the sun. He went cautiously, watching for Indians. If he were seen by them, they might or might not kill him. But they would certainly take his pony, and to be left unhorsed on the plains might mean death, since as a matter of course they would rob him of his rifle.

LATE in the afternoon he hid in a grape thicket and slept. When he awoke the moon rode high in the heavens. He mounted and rode toward the river. It was necessary to find the wheel tracks at the lower ford so that he would know the direction taken by the buffalo hunters.

He was hungry, since he had not eaten since breakfast. The country was full of game both large and small, but he had been afraid to fire his rifle for fear of attracting attention.

Young as he was, there was no danger of his getting lost as long as he could see the sun by day and the stars at night. He was far more competent to look after himself alone on the plains than a tenderfoot of twice his age. He had been brought up in a school of hard experience which had no vacations.

When he reached the river he turned down and followed the bank to the ford. In the brush, a little way back from this, he dismounted, picketed the pony and slept again. Not till daylight did he awake.

Boone picked up the wagon tracks of the hunters, but before he followed them he looked longingly across the river. He had back-tracked almost to his home. The house and clearing were hidden in a hollow half a mile or more downstream. He could not see them, but their location was indicated by a banner of smoke rising in the clear morning air. His mother was probably baking biscuits and frying ham. Almost he could sniff the aroma of her coffee.

It did not even occur to him that he might go back home. He had started for the buffalo camp and he meant to go there. The wagon tracks led westward, into the unknown wilds of Palo Pinto. Where they went he too intended to go.

When he could endure hunger no longer he shot a prairie hen. As soon as possible he got away from the place. He had traveled a couple of miles before he could consider eating it. To light a fire, even if he had had punk and flint with him, would have been dangerous. He ate the hen raw, much to his disgust. But he had to preserve his strength. How far he would have to travel before reaching the camp he did not know.

LATE in the afternoon he began to see buffalo, at first in small bunches, later in larger ones. About dusk he saw smoke. Either the buffalo camp or a party of Indians lay just ahead of him. He waited in the brush, from a little elevation watching the camp as well as he could in the failing light for signs to tell him whether these were friends or foes. It was too dark to see whether there were wagons there.

A man moved away from the fire and crossed a small open space toward the horses. As he walked, his arms swung by his sides. Boone gave a small whoop of joy. Indians do not swing their arms when they walk. He rode straight into the camp, calling out his presence as he approached. Otherwise some startled hunter might drill him through with lead before he discovered who the stranger was.

Four rifles covered Boone while he drew near.

"Be keerful, stranger. Keep yore hands right where they're at," a man in fringed buckskin ordered. Then, in surprise, he added, "Dog my cats, it's a kid—Jim Sibley's young un! What in Texas are *you* doing here?"

The man was Wayne Lemley. He lowered his buffalo gun and waited for an explanation. The hunter felt a little sheepish. In spite of the watch always maintained the camp had been taken unawares. If, instead of this boy, Kiowas or Comanches had got as close, there might by this time have been one outfit of hunters less.

"I jest drapped in to hunt with you," Boone explained.

They gathered around him, half a dozen bearded, unkempt men—everybody in camp except the two on guard.

"Yore paw back there in the brush?" asked Lew Keener, a lank, grizzled old-timer who had been with Kirby Smith's troops during the war.

"No, seh, he ain't."

"Who then?"

"I came alone."

"Alone?"

Boone slid stiffly from the saddle.

"Why, yes," he said.

"Alone—from the yon side the river?" Lemley queried.

The small boy adjusted the "one gallus" trousers, the legs of which had climbed during the long ride. "I done told you twice," he said evenly. "Mr. Mattock axed me to come, didn't he?"

Mattock tugged at his ragged red beard, almost too amazed for speech. He wore a leather hunting shirt reaching almost to his boots.

"By Ginney, I did ask the little tadpole—kinda funnin' to pass the time, but Jumpin' Jehosophat, I didn't figure he'd fly to it thisaway, Wayne."

Lemley was hard to convince. Somehow he knew it was true, the little fellow was so serious and matter of fact. But that a child would travel for days alone through the Indian country was unbelievable.

"How come Jim Sibley to leave you start?" he demanded.

"He didn't know I was comin'. I started at night."

"But what for?"

"Like I said. To hunt with you-all."

"You ran away from home to hunt with us?"

The little boy corrected gravely this method of stating the fact.

"I didn't exactly run away. I jes' left."

"Well, I'll say you shore had nigger luck gettin' through to us," Keener commented.

Mattock took from the pocket of his shirt a plug of tobacco and bit off a generous portion. Chewing always helped cerebration for him.

"Something seldom about this kid," he said, falling into a bit of local slang.

"What you aim to do with him, Wayne, now he's wished himself on you?" asked Keener with a grin.

"I dunno. Reckon we'll have to keep him here till his folks come for him or till we go back. Cain't send him home. Take too long to close-herd him back across the river."

"That's its shape," agreed another hunter, one who for obvious reasons went by the name of Peg Leg. "We're not to blame because he came."

Boone summarized the situation calmly.

"Nothin' to do but let me stay. I'll work like the Watsons. You've got another hand, that's all."

"Hmp! What about yore folks?" Keener interjected.

"I won't pester you-all to take me home. I'll stay long as there's a button on Jabe's coat."

"All right. That's settled," Lemley said grimly. "An' to start you right I'm gonna tan yore hide proper for runnin' away. You shag along with me back of that wagon, son, an' take what's comin' to you."

The boy "shagged" obediently to the spot named.

Lemley picked up a whip and followed him.

CHAPTER III

BOONE KILLS 'EM AND SKINS 'EM

BOONE was the handy lad about camp. He hobbled horses, helped hitch the teams, flunkied for the cook and did odd jobs. The hunters called him Pocket Change, made him the victim of their harmless jokes; but they watched over him, curbed his adventurous spirit and would have protected him with their lives.

The lad was a willing worker and soon became popular in the camp. He did cheerfully whatever task was assigned him, and he was so self-contained that the men did not realize what a surge of homesickness sometimes swept over him. It was chiefly at night, when he was in bed under a buffalo robe, that the lonesome child in him was uppermost and cried out for his mother's arms and her warm smile of sympathy.

Sometimes the boy rode out with the men and helped skin the dead buffaloes. He held the reins while the hides were loaded into the wagon to be brought to the camp and later he joined those who pegged down the pelts to sun-dry on a knoll. Under the direction of the old Confederate soldier, Keener, who had taken a fancy to him, he spent days scraping away drying bits of flesh still clinging to the hides. The smell from the improvised drying yard rose to heaven, but Boone became used to it in time so that he was scarcely aware of it.

From listening to so many stories by the hunters Boone knew just how the buffaloes were killed. Early in the morning the men would take their big fifty Sharp's rifles, loaded with long shells carrying one hundred ten grains of powder, and ride toward the feeding ground. They approached on the windward side of the herd, keeping out of sight and dismounting a quarter of a mile or more away. From this point they crept closer, picked out a victim and shot it just back of the fore shoulder from such an angle that the ball would penetrate the lungs.

The report of the gun would frighten the herd and the leaders would start a run. A bullet would kick up the dirt in front of them and turn the moving mass. This would be repeated. Presently the herd began to mill 'round and 'round, after which the animals could be shot at leisure.

Boone's chance came one day. A stampeded herd came thundering past the camp, shaking the earth with the impact of their tread. The boy seized his rifle and ran out to a small rise. The sight was one to inspire awe. There were thousands upon thousands of the bison. They were packed close and their backs lifted and fell like the waves of an undulating sea. The sheer momentum of their rush would have swept into kindling the frame walls of a house, had there been one in their path.

"Golly, they're comin' lickety brindle," the boy called to Keener.

They were scarcely a hundred yards from him. He knelt, took aim and fired. Five times he shot before the herd had passed. When the roar of their charge had died away he saw that two bulls were down, a third was staggering and coughing as it stumbled in the wake of its fellows.

For once Boone lost his unmoved manner. He had killed bison, three of them. They were bulls, to be sure, and the hides of bulls were less valuable than those of cows, but that was of small importance to him now. He was a buffalo hunter at last.

He shouted to Keener.

"Lookee! Lookee what I did!"

The old Arkansan came up from the camp grinning. He had slain his thousands, but he understood the thrill of the boy's first kill.

"Bully boy! You sure went to 'em all spraddled out," he said by way of congratulation. "Yore old Sharp's bites as well as barks, son."

"I'm gonna skin 'em myself," Boone said.

This he did by himself, with the exception of some help in turning the animals. Before night he had the hides pegged out on the drying ground.

Boone could hardly wait for the hunters to get home to learn what he had done. He did not intend to tell them himself. He meant to listen while Keener and the other two guards retailed the story.

But to his surprise none of them mentioned what had taken place. They smoked their pipes around the campfire and chatted about anything else except the buffaloes he had killed.

After a time he could stand it no longer. He offered them a lead.

"A whoppin' big herd came rarin' past here today on a stampede," the boy suggested.

"A herd of jackrabbits?" asked Mattock politely.

"No, seh. A herd of buffaloes."

"Three of 'em drapped dead clost to camp," one of the guards said.

"Got tired runnin' likely," Peg Leg guessed.

"They didn't either," Boone protested indignantly. "I shot 'em."

Lemley spoke to Keener, nodding his head toward Boone.

"Gets notions sometimes, I've noticed. When he shoots a quail he thinks it's a turkey. Did he shoot something today?"

"Three polecats," answered the old soldier gravely. "He was right proud of 'em. Cut up the hams an' hung 'em on a tree, an' stretched the hides out on the dryin' ground. He aims to take 'em home for keepsakes."

"He knows better, 'cause he helped me skin 'em," the boy asserted.

"Well, they're out on the ground all pegged out proper. The moon's riz. What say we go look at 'em?" Keener proposed.

They trooped out, half a dozen of them, and inspected the hides.

"That's right, polecats," Peg Leg announced after one look at them.

Boone could have wept with chagrin, but he did not. He perceived that this was a conspiracy of alleged humor to minimize his achievement.

"How many thousand head did you-all say was in that herd of polecats, Boone?" asked Mattock.

Boone took refuge in dignified silence.

Next morning the boy won his reward. Lemley said to him after breakfast—

"Want to slap a saddle on that broomtail of yours, Boone, an' come along with us to shoot some more polecats?"

The shining eyes of the boy were answer enough. He could scarcely eat his breakfast. Long before the others were ready he sat Pinto, the old Sharp's in hand, waiting impatiently for the start.

CHAPTER IV

JUMPED!

DAY OR night the guard at the buffalo camp was never relaxed. The fact that no Comanches or Kiowas had been seen was no evidence that they were not watching the hunters from the cap rock or the brakes. Men never left the wagons, even to go as far as the drying grounds, without carrying their rifles as a matter of course. They had their revolvers strapped on while they sat at supper. Weapons were within reach as they slept.

One morning Boone returned from the creek with a barrel of water on a lizard.* Keener walked beside him as a guard. The boy drove the mule to the end of the wagon where the cooking was done.

Lemley called to him after he had unhitched.

"How'd you like to go home, son?"

The boy's heart leaped. Every night now he had to remember that he was a man to keep from crying himself to sleep. He longed passionately to see his mother. His conscience reproached him for having left her in the way he had. He knew now, by some intuition denied him at the time, how much she must have suffered, how greatly she must have feared for his safety.

"I'd be right glad to go, seh," he said in a quiet voice that belied the tumult in his breast.

"I'm sending back two of the wagons tomorrow loaded with hides. You can go along if you like."

"I sure would."

Boone's lips trembled. He felt a surge of emotion well up in him. In order that nobody might see the quick tears spring to his eyes he stooped, took off one boot and pretended to shake out of it a pebble.

Lemley strolled closer.

"Son, don't ever do a thing like that again—runnin' away from home, I mean. You'll never know how you've torn yore mother's heart. I wouldn't give a barrel of shucks for a boy who is not good to his mother. Mrs. Sibley is a fine woman, one of the very best. I hope yore father will whop you proper when you get back, an' if I know Jim Sibley he'll do his duty."

"Yes, seh, I reckon he will," Boone agreed.

"You're not an ornery boy, Boone. You work an' you do what you're told. You're not sassy. That's why I don't want you to grow up ugly as galvanized sin."

"I—I aim to be good to my mother," Boone said, a catch in his voice.

"Well, see you do." Lemley desisted from further preaching. "Better not ride yore pinto today. You'll be using him pretty hard for two-three days."

THE WAGON outfit started for the river at dawn. Three men went with it, in addition to Boone.

"I don't reckon you'll have any trouble with Injuns," Lemley said to Keener, who was in charge of the party. "We haven't seen hide or hair of any since we've been out. But you want to be watchin' all the time."

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*A lizard was a fork of a tree used as a sled to haul stones or water. When employed for the latter purpose a crosspiece held the barrel and four standards kept it from tipping over.

The old Confederate nodded.

"I ain't forgettin' the old scout's advice, 'When you see Injun sign be keerful; when you don't see any be more keerful.' No, sir, I don't aim to throw down on myself."

"Push on the reins right lively an' you had ought to reach the river late tonight. Well, I wish you luck. So long, Boone. Tell yore father I gave you a good blacksnakin' an' maybe he'll go easier on you."

The wagons moved away across the prairie, one following the other closely. Keener led the way on horseback, both to keep a lookout against attack and to pick the best road for the teams. Boone also was in the saddle. He was not in the least worried about Indians. He had heard about their atrocities all his life, but he had never seen first hand evidence of these. Probably there were no Kiowas or Comanches within a hundred miles.

Keener did not stop the party to eat at noon. He wanted to get across the Brazos as soon as possible. They made good time until the middle of the afternoon, when the trail became very rough and jolty. Both drivers complained that their loads were slipping.

To carry hides a long distance it was necessary to fold the hides, hair side in, before they became flint dry, to load with the legs lapping in the wagon, and to tie the whole down with ropes. These hides had become too dry to fold and had been piled into the wagon flat.

The old soldier called a consultation. It was decided to hold the loads down with boom poles. About a mile to the left of the wagons ran a creek lined with cottonwoods.

"The kid an' I will ride over to the creek an' cut some poles," Keener said. "We'll take a singletree and chain with us to drag 'em back. While we're gone you two had better reload the wagons."

Boone rode with Keener to the creek. They had to drop down through a hackberry thicket to its banks, out of sight of the wagons. The ex-Confederate swung from the saddle, laid his rifle against a log and chopped down a couple of springy poles.

The sound of a shot reached them, of a second, then of half a dozen.

Boone never forgot the sight of Keener's face. He looked as though Death had reached out and touched him. A wave of terror engulfed the boy.

"Injuns!" he cried.

"Stay here!" ordered Keener. "I'm going to the brow of the rise. Back in a little while."

Keener moved swiftly up through the hackberry thicket. He knew that the Indians must have been watching the wagon outfit and must have seen him and Boone ride away. Even before he reached the ridge the firing had died down. When he saw the wagons one glance confirmed his fears. More than a score of mounted warriors surrounded the outfit. Keener believed the teamsters were dead. They were old frontiersmen, and given time to put up a fight would never let themselves fall alive into the hands of the savages. But dead or alive, he could do nothing for them. He had to think of the boy's life and his own.

Keener turned. Frightened eyes set in the boy's white face stared at him.

"I couldn't stay back there," Boone whispered.

"We'll have to light out an' shove for the river," the old soldier said.

They ran back through the thicket to their horses. Keener flung the lad into his saddle to save time. Boone's heart was beating wildly. He would be caught and killed. If they could they would take him alive and torture him.

"D-don't leave me," he begged of his friend as they rode up the hillside on the other bank of the creek.

The voice of the old Arkansan came evenly to him.

"Don't you get skeered, son. I'll be right with you. We've got a head start an' we'll beat 'em from where they laid the chunk. We cain't fly but we can catch birds."

THEY caught their first sight of the pursuing Indians from the top of a little draw. At the same time the savages saw them and let out the yell such as had shaken many a soul before this. There were perhaps a dozen of them, still on the far side of the creek, about three hundred and fifty or four hundred yards distant. The sound of that yell, the swift glance he took at the naked riders behind, melted the boy's courage. He began to whimper.

"None of that," ordered his companion curtly. "You got to go through. We'll cut the mustard if you've got sand in yore craw."

They were riding for the river, still twenty miles away, over a very rough country. Keener watched his chance, guided with his knees, and fired his big "fifty" without slackening the pace. A pony stumbled and fell. The Indians answered the shot, but they were outranged and their bullets fell short.

Boone was riding in front. He lifted his rifle from the saddle.

"No, son," Keener told him. "Right now I'll do all the shootin' is necessary. You 'tend to yore ridin'."

"There's more of 'em—over to the right!" Boone cried.

"I 'lowed there would be. We'll keep right on for the cap rock—won't let 'em drive us back if we can help it."

To Boone this looked suicidal. They and the Indians were converging toward a common point.

"We'll beat 'em to it," the plainsman said.

His voice rang out more confidently than the facts justified. They would beat the natives to the cap rock if let alone. But how close would those coming up from the right be when they passed? If he and the boy won through it would be by a narrow margin, Keener knew. But he dared not let himself be driven into the open country to the left. Their one chance was to outride the Comanches trying to intercept them.

Keener rode on the right side of the boy, between him and the Indians. Twice he fired, riding at full speed. Presently bullets began to throw dirt in front of and behind their horses.

"We'll make it. They can't shoot for beans," the old-timer shouted. "Ride hell for leather, son. We'll be past in a minute now."

Even as he spoke a bullet struck his horse. Keener was flung over its head as it went down. Boone pulled up, rather by instinct than by volition. The unhorsed man snatched up his rifle, ran toward the boy and vaulted on the back of the pony behind the saddle. Instantly Pinto struck into a gallop again.

The rock rim was less than half a mile from the fugitives. The Comanches were pressing them closely. During that wild ride Keener's buffalo gun did deadly execution. It dropped two horses. It sent one brave flying from his mount.

As they drew close to the rock rim Keener gave instructions.

"Listen, son. We got one chance—just one. I'll jump off above the rock rim. You keep on going. Head for the low ford. Get to yore father's place an' bring me help."

"But—"

The voice of the old soldier was harsh and final.

"Don't argue. Do as I say. An', boy, ride like the Watsons."

They rode straight for a break in the rampart of rocks. Keener dropped from the pony and it clambered up the rock fault like a mountain goat. Hard on its heels came the buffalo hunter.

Boone obeyed orders. Without stopping, he rode forward across the mesa. Once he looked back. No Indians were in view, but he could hear their blood freezing yelps down below. Keener lay on his face. The boom of his buffalo gun sounded once and again. Then, borne clear on the thin air, came the defiant rebel yell the old fellow had learned when he rode with Kirby Smith's raiders.

The boy did not know it at the time, but that ringing yell was Wesley Keener's gallant challenge to Death. He had come to the end of the trail and was going out like a soldier.

STEADILY Boone covered the miles. A thousand times he looked back, fearful lest his eyes fall upon a line of bobbing riders. Once, in the shinnery, he started some antelopes, and the sound of their crashing through the oak bushes gave him a moment of panic.

Pinto was laboring heavily. Its feet began to drag. The little paint horse had answered every call upon its strength made by Boone, but as it dragged through the sand now its feet stumbled. Dusk was falling. The river must be near, but the boy doubted that the horse could make the crossing.

He dismounted, to relieve Pinto in the heavy sand. The pony's head drooped more and more. It staggered and fell, never to rise again.

Boone walked toward the river. Darkness came. He plowed doggedly forward. The moon rose. At last—the river. He had struck the Brazos within a half mile of the home crossing. Following the bank, he came to the ford.

The water was low. At another time Boone might not have attempted it. But he thought of Keener fighting for his life on the rock rim. He must get help to him. Soon.

The boy waded in. He knew the tricks of the current at this point, for he had been across the ford twenty times with his father and brothers. Here there was a sand bar. There the current ran deep. By bearing to the right one found the place where the stream was wider and therefore shallower.

Water rose to his waist, but no higher. He reached in safety the farther shore. At once, exhausted though he was, he turned toward the hollow where lay his home. He reached the head of the hollow and looked down. They were there, the house, the clearing, the worm fence surrounding the pasture. The hounds were barking. He could see them running into the open, half a dozen of them, yelping a warning that some one was coming.

A lump swelled in the throat of the boy. Home at last! Home after many wanderings.

He moved down into the clearing. The dogs recognized him, ran forward and leaped at him joyfully in a din of yelpings. He pushed through them to the house, past the ash hopper from which lye was dripping.

From inside the cabin his father's voice called—

"Who's there?"

"It's me, Boone," the boy answered.

The door was flung open. James Sibley, half dressed, caught Boone in his arms with a little sob of relief. He had given up his son for dead, and here he was alive and close.

Callie ran out.

"What is it? What is it?" she cried sure somehow that there was news about the little boy who nowadays was never out of her mind. At sight of Boone she stopped.

"Mother!" he cried, and flung himself upon her.

She caught him to her bosom. When she spoke it was in a voice he did not recognize.

"My boy! My li'l baby!"

The older sons joined the group.

Presently, the first burst of emotion past, James Sibley asked—

"Where have you been?"

"With the buffalo hunters. Mr. Lemley sent me back with the wagons." The boy's voice broke. There had come back to him, forgotten for a moment in the joy of his homecoming, the tragic story of his return. "The Injuns jumped us. They—killed the drivers. Mr. Keener, he stayed to fight them."

"With the other men?"

"No—alone. They killed his horse. He said for me to bring help."

"How many Injuns?"

"A lot—thirty—forty maybe."

Sibley roused himself to instant action. He sent his sons on horseback to gather the neighbors.

Three hours later a small rescue party crossed the river headed for the rim-rock. In all there were nine of them, heavily armed. Boone was at home in bed, safely tucked up by his mother. His protest that they could not find the place without him had been summarily dismissed.

"I'm sending yore father an' the three boys. That's enough of the family for one time," Callie said grimly.

She knew they were going on a forlorn hope. Keener had chosen to give his life that her little boy might live. He had held back the Indians long enough for Boone to escape. But she had no expectation that the rescuers would find him alive. Moreover, there was always the chance that James Sibley's party would be ambushed and wiped out. The Indians were in far greater numbers. They were wily warriors.

The mother waited all through the night and most of the next day in an anguish of dread, and while she waited she sat in the cabin with weapons ready in case the Indians should cross the river and attack.

It was late afternoon when the posse rode into the clearing. They were tired and hungry and caked with dust. The dry lather on the horses showed how hard they had been ridden.

Callie made dinner for them while her husband told the story of their adventure. They had seen no Indians from first to last. At the rim-rock they had found the body of Wesley Keener. Around him, on the rock where he lay, were dozens of shells flung out from the buffalo hunter's gun after he had emptied them. There were no dead Indians in sight. The raiders had taken their casualties with them, as was their custom. But Keener was a dead shot. It was certain the attackers had paid heavy toll before the old soldier had sent the last shot crashing through his own brain.

CHAPTER V

TOUGH NUT WAKES

TOUGH NUT lay in a coma of sunshine. Apache Street was almost deserted. A hound crossed the dusty road leisurely pursued by a three year old child giving orders in a piping voice.

"Tum here, Tarlo, dod-done you."

Carlo went its way, magnificently oblivious of the infant. Drooping horses waited patiently at the hitchracks in front of the saloons. A grocery clerk came out of a store and from a watering can sprinkled the hot ground in front.

A four-mule team came down the street. The fine yellow dust of travel lay thick on the canvas covering the load. The muleskinner was a stranger. He had come to Cochise County from New Mexico by way of the San Simon Valley. Already he was pleased with Tough Nut. It sat on the top of the world. A roll of hills and valleys fell away on either side to the shining mountains, to the Mules and the Whetstones, the Dragoons and the Huachucas. The miles of cholla and greasewood and mesquite in that panorama of space were telescoped to a minimum in the clear untempered light of the champagne atmosphere.

The adobe town was clean. The road of disintegrated granite gave evidence of municipal pride. Tough Nut belied its name, its evil reputation. So Boone Sibley decided. It was a nice town, and peaceful as old age. He was glad he had come. His arms and his long lithe body stretched in a yawn of indolent well being. Soon he would hit the hay; for thirty hours he had not slept. Grub first, then sleep. Yes, a real nice quiet town. That woman now going into the butcher shop with the baby in her arms . . .

A shot shattered the stillness. Through the swing doors of a saloon burst a man. He was small, past the prime of life. As he ran odd sounds came from his throat. They were not yelps nor shouts, nor were they moans; rather a combination of all three. The awkwardness of his flight would have been comical but for the terror on his face.

A big man, revolver in hand, tore through the doors in pursuit. Another shot ripped the silence. The little man staggered, stumbled and went down just beside the wagon. With swift strides the gunman moved toward him. The eyes in his bearded face blazed.

Boone Sibley lived by the code of the West. This was a private difficulty, therefore none of his business. He started to slide from the far side of the wagon in order to use it as a bulwark between him and stray bullets. Started to do so, but changed his mind. The hound had come around the tail of the wagon and hard on its heels the three year old. The bearded man, intent on the kill, did not see the youngster. His weapon jerked up, covering the victim.

The muleskinner swung his whip, swiftly, expertly. He could pick a fly from the ear of the off leader. Now the lash snaked out, twined itself around the wrist of the big man and sent the revolver flying. Yet another moment and one hundred ninety pounds of bone and muscle had descended upon the killer from the sky. The fellow went down as though hurled into the earth by a piledriver. He lay motionless, the breath driven out of his body by the shock of the assault.

Lean loined and agile, Boone was up like a cat. He scooped up from the ground the revolver and whirled, his back against the front wheel of the wagon. For out of the saloon had come men, four or five of them. They had drawn guns, at least two of them had, and they were moving toward the scene of action. Out of the tail of his eye Boone saw the little man, dragging one leg, vanish behind the wagon.

The bearded man sat up, one side of his face covered with dust. He was still dazed, but anger was rising in him. He glared at Boone, ferocious as a tiger with its claws cut. His .44 gone, he was momentarily helpless.

"Who in Mexico are you?" he roared.

The mulewhacker answered not the question but explained the issue.

"The kid. You didn't see it."

"What kid?"

"With the dog. In the line of yore fire." Boone's words were directed toward the bearded man, his eyes and his attention toward the newcomers.

They were big rangy men, hard eyed and leathery. They wore long drooping mustaches after the fashion of the period.

One of them spoke, harshly, with authority. Beneath the black mustache he had a stiff imperial. His mouth was straight and thin lipped.

"That's right, Curt. You didn't see the kid."

The bearded man rose and took two long steps toward Boone.

"Gimme that gun," he demanded.

The young teamster had lived all of his twenty-three years on the frontier where emergencies must be met by instant decision. Already he knew that the man with the imperial was a leader. The breadth of his shoulders, the depth of his chest, the poised confidence of manner, were certificates of strength. He alone had not yet drawn a weapon.

"I'll give it to *you*, sir," Boone replied. "Yore friend is some annoyed yet, I expect."

Holding the revolver by the long barrel, he handed it to the man selected.

"I'll take that gun, Whip," its owner said roughly.

"Don't burn up the road, Curt," his friend answered. "This young pilgrim is right. You might have hit the kid. He didn't aim to jump you but to save the little fellow. I reckon you'll have to leave him go this time."

"Leave him go? After he lit on me all spraddled out. Gun or no gun, I'll sure take him to a cleaning." Curt moved toward Boone, a trifle heavily. He was a full bodied man, physically more like the grizzly than the panther. He stopped in front of the teamster.

Young Sibley looked at him quietly, steadily.

"I'm not lookin' for trouble, sir," he said. "Sorry I had to drap on you on account of the kid. I figured you wouldn't want to hurt the little fellow."

"I aim to work you over proper," the bearded man announced. "I don't need no gun."

Boone's revolver was on the wagon seat. This was just as well. He was debarred from using it, both because his antagonist was unarmed and because the man's friends would instantly have shot him down if he had drawn a weapon. A crowd was beginning to gather. He heard comments and prophecies.

"Curt will sure eat up this pilgrim."

"Y'betcha! If Mr. Muleskinner allows he's the venemous kyote he's due to get unroostered *pronto*."

The bearded man lashed out at his victim. Boone ducked, drove a left to the fellow's cheek and danced out of range. Curt roared with anger, put down his head and charged. His heavy arms swung like flails, savagely, wildly, with great power behind the blows. The younger man, lithe as a wildcat, alert to forestall each movement, smothered some of these swings, blocked others, dodged the rest. His timing, his judgment of distance were perfect. He jolted the bearded man with two slashing lefts and a short arm uppercut, sidestepped the ensuing rush, and with a powerful right, all the driving power of his weight back of it, landed flush on the chin at precisely the right instant. Caught off balance, the big man went down like a pole-axed steer.

He went down, and he stayed down. His body half rolled over in the dust. He made a spasmodic effort to rise, one of his hands clawing the ground for a hold. Then he relaxed and seemed to fall into himself.

FOR A moment nobody spoke, nobody moved. Curt French had the reputation of being the best bit of fighting machinery in the new camp. In the current parlance, he could whip his weight in wildcats. So it had been said, and he had given proof in plenty of his prowess. And now an unknown muleskinner, probably a greener who hailed from some whistling post in the desert, had laid him out expertly, with a minimum of effort, and there was not a scratch on the young chap's face to show that he had been in a fight.

An enthusiastic miner slapped his hat against the leg of a dusty pair of trousers.

"Never saw the beat of it. Short an' sweet. Sews Curt up in a sack, an' when he's good an' ready bing goes the sockdolager an' Curt turns up his toes to the daisies."

"Say, you ain't Paddy Ryan,* are you?" demanded an admiring bartender.

The man who had been called Whip pushed forward and spoke curtly.

"What's yore name, young fellow? And where d'you hail from?"

The teamster met his heavy frown steadily.

"Boone Sibley. I'm from Texas."

"Well, Texas man, I'm offerin' you advice free gratis. Drive on, an' keep right on going. Tucson is a good town. So's Phoenix."

"What's the matter with this town?"

"Not healthy?"

"For me, you mean?"

"For you."

The eyes of the two clashed, those of Boone hard and cold as chilled steel, his opponent's dark and menacing, deep socketed in a grim, harsh face. It was a drawn battle.

The older man added explanation to his last answer.

"For any one who has done to Curt French what you've done."

"Meanin' there will be a gun play?" Boone asked quietly.

"Don't put words in my mouth, young fellow," the other said stiffly. "Leave it as it lays. Light out. Make tracks. *Vamos*."

Boone did not say he would take this advice. He did not say he would not.

"I'm sure a heap obliged to you," he murmured, with the little drawl that might or might not conceal irony.

His glance went around the circle of faces, some curious, some hostile, some frankly admiring. It dropped to the man he had vanquished, and took in the fact that the fellow was beginning to stir. Then, unhurriedly, he turned his back, put a foot on the hub of the wheel, and climbed back into the wagon.

"Giddap!" he clucked to the mules.

The long whip snaked out. The tugs

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*This was a few months before John L. Sullivan defeated Paddy Ryan for the heavyweight boxing championship of America.

straightened as the mules leaned forward. The wagon went crunching down the street.

CHAPTER VI

BOONE MEETS MR. TURLEY

A MAN called on Boone that evening at the Dallas House. He gave his name as Mack Riley. A youngish man, weatherbeaten and tanned, his face had written on it marks of the Emerald Isle. He spoke as a Westerner does, with only a trace of accent.

"I come from Mr. Turley," he explained. "He wants to see you. Reckon he feels some obligated to you."

"Never heard of him," Boone answered.

"He's the fellow you kept Curt French from killin' today. Curt got him in the leg, so he couldn't come himself. He asked would you come to see him."

"What's he want?"

"I dunno. He's kinda mysterious—lives under his own hat, as you might say. It's not far. He stays in a shack back of the Buffalo Corral."

"What was the trouble between him and this Curt French?"

"Something he put in the paper. He's editor of *The Gold Pocket.* Say, young fellow, I saw the show you put on. You certainly were sailing. You been educated all round, up an' down, over, under an' between. Either that or else you had nigger luck."

"I expect I was lucky. Tell me about this Curt French—him an' his friends too."

Across Riley's map-of-Ireland face there flitted an expression that masked expression. His eyes went dead. It was as though he had put on a mask.

"What about 'em?" he asked warily.

"Anything about 'em—or all about 'em. I didn't quite *sabe* the game."

"Meanin' just what?" asked Riley cautiously.

"I got an impression—maybe there's nothing to it— that this Curt an' the man he called Whip an' two-three others were kinda in cahoots."

Riley said nothing, in a manner that implied he could say a great deal if he chose.

Boone continued, watching him—

"When this Whip fellow told me to throw the bud into my leaders an' keep travelin' I reckoned he was talkin' for his gang as well as for French."

"Me, if I thought so, I'd sure take his advice," Riley said in a voice studiously colorless.

"Why?" asked Boone bluntly. "Is this Whip a bad crowd?"

"You'll never get me to say so, young fellow. I told you what I'd do. That's enough."

"You've said too much or too little, Mr. Riley."

"I've said all I aim to say."

"Those other blackbirds that had their guns out, who were they?"

"One was Russ Quinn, brother of Whip. The other was Sing Elder."

"Kinda hang together, do they, them an' this French fellow?" Sibley asked.

"You might say they were friends."

"Got any business?"

"Right now I'm swampin' for Dave Reynolds at the Buffalo."

"I was speakin' of these other gents—the Quinns an' Elder an' French."

"Oh, them! Whip owns the Occidental. Biggest gambling house in town. Sing runs a game for him. They're cousins. Russ is shotgun messenger for the express company."

"An' Mr. French."

"Curt? Well, I dunno. He bucks the tiger consid'rable. Onct in a while he's lookout at the Occidental."

"A tinhorn?"

"I'm not using that word about him. Not none. An' if I was you I wouldn't either, stranger. You're a likely young fellow, an' you're sure a jim-dandy with yore dukes. You'd do fine in Tucson likely. It's a right lively town, an' the road there is in first class shape."

"Tucson certainly gets good recommendations from you gentlemen in Tough Nut," Boone said dryly. "Any of you ever try that road yore own selves?"

Riley gave up, his patience exhausted.

"All right. You're the doctor. Maybe you know best. May be nobody is aimin' anyhow to hang yore hide on the corral fence. I thought, you being only a kid, I'd see could I do anything for you. More fool me. You know yore own business likely."

"I'm much obliged, Mr. Riley," the Texan said in his gentle voice. "But I reckon I'll look around a while before I move on."

"Suit yoreself," the Irishman said shortly. "What about Turley?"

"I'll see him. Want I should come with you?"

"Better sift around after dark. It's the 'dobe shack just west of the corral. You can't miss it—a one-room house."

Boone did not wait till after dark; he saw no reason why he should. For the present at least he meant to stay in Tough Nut. To move about furtively, after dark, avoiding trouble which might never materialize, was not consistent with his temperament. There was no reason why these men should make difficulties for him. The affair with French had been none of his seeking. He had acted instinctively to save the child's life. Afterward he had apologized, had tried to placate the angry man. His associates would probably talk him out of his resentment.

None the less Boone went prepared for trouble. In a holster under his left arm he carried a Colt .45 six-shooter, one with a nine inch barrel. Another, not so long, hung from his belt. He did not expect to have to use them. Still, he wanted to know that they were handy if needed. The point about trouble was that it usually jumped you suddenly when least expected.

THE SUN was in the west, setting in a crotch of the jagged porphyry mountains. It was still king of the desert, its rays streaming over the silvery sheen of the mesquite. Boone stood a few minutes to watch the spectacle, at the end of a street which stopped abruptly at the rockrim above the valley. The dust, finer than sand, gave color to the landscape, an opaline mist that blurred and softened garish details. Already an imperial purple filled the pockets of the hills. Soon now that burning lake above which fired the crags and sent streamers of pink and crimson and orange flaming across the sky would fade slowly into the deep blue of approaching night.

Boone turned and walked with his long, easy stride back to Boot Hill Street, then followed it as far as the Buffalo corral. His eye picked up the adobe shack described to him by Riley and two minutes later he was knocking at the door.

It was opened to him by Riley. There were in the cabin a bed, some plain furniture and a great many books. On the bed lay the wounded man. Against the wall, chair tilted back and one run down boot-heel caught in a rung of it, lounged a curly headed youth with the rich bloom of health in his cheeks. He was dressed like a cowboy.

Riley did the honors.

"Meet Mr. Turley, Mr. Sibley. Shake hands with Mr. Rhodes."

The cowpuncher unhooked his heel, dropped the front legs of the chair to the floor and got to his feet, all with one swift lithe motion.

"Known as Dusty Rhodes," he added by way of further introduction. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Sibley. You're right famous already in our li'l burg."

"News to me, sir," Boone replied.

He liked the appearance of this impetuous youth. An open face recommended him, and the promise of buoyant gayety was prepossessing.

"You couldn't expect to make Curt French look like a plugged nickel without having word of it spread like a prairie fire. He's been the big wind pudding here for quite some time."

"Meanin' that he's a false alarm?"

"No, sirree. He's there both ways from the ace. In strict confidence, he's a dirty flop eared wolf, but I reckon he'll back his own bluffs."

The man on the bed spoke.

"I have to thank you, Mr. Sibley, for saving my life today."

His voice held a clipped precise accent. He tugged nervously at his short bristly mustache. Boone was to learn later that this was an habitual gesture with him. It arose from nervousness, from an inner conviction that he was quite unfitted to cope with the wild frontier life into which some malign fate had thrust him.

"That's all right," young Sibley said. The subject embarrassed him, though no sign of this showed in his immobile face. "Fact is, I was thinkin' of the kid. Mothers hadn't ought to let their babies go maverickin' off alone."

"Not much to you perhaps, but a good deal to me," the little editor replied, referring to what was in his mind rather than to what Boone had said. A muscular spasm of reminiscent fear contorted his face for a moment. "The ruffian meant to murder me, and but for the grace of God and your bravery I would now be a dead man," he concluded solemnly.

"There's a right few slips between what a feller figures an' what he makes out to get done. Curt aimed to bump you off like I aimed onct to bring to my wickiup for keeps a li'l lady in the San Simon, only my plans got kinda disarranged when she eloped with a bald headed old donker who had four kids an' a cow ranch. You cain't always sometimes most generally tell. Lady Luck is liable to be sittin' in to the game," the cowboy suggested with philosophic flippancy.

"It wasn't luck this time. It was God's providence that I'm so little injured," Turley corrected. "He held the hand of the slayer because my work is not yet done. It is about that I want to see you, Mr. Sibley."

Boone said nothing. Evidently the editor had some proposition to make. The Texan had a propensity for silence. He could wait while another did the talking. It was an asset in the Southwest to be a man of few words, especially when those few were decisive.

"The Lord chose you as His instrument. I take it as a sign that we are to be associated together."

"How?" asked Boone.

He was not favorably impressed. Turley was not his kind of man. A feeling of distaste, almost of disgust, rose in him. He had seen the editor running for his life, in a panic of raw fear, the manhood in him dissolved in quick terror. Now he was talking religious cant like a preacher. In Boone's code, inherited from his environment, the one essential virtue was courage. A man might be good; he might be bad; without nerve he was negligible, not worth the powder to blow him up. Measured by this test, Turley failed to pass. It looked now as though he were a hypocrite to boot.

Turley settled his shoulders nervously before he began to talk.

"You are a stranger, Mr. Sibley. I do not know you, nor do you know me. What I have to say will be spoken by one who has the best interest of the community at heart. I am editor of the local newspaper, *The Gold Pocket*. That paper has a duty to perform to Cochise County. It must stand for law and order, for advancing civilization. Do you agree with me?"

"I'm listenin'," Boone said. "You're talkin'."

"I take it that you have had a reasonable amount of schooling, Mr. Sibley, from the standpoint of the Southwest."

"Correct, sir."

"This community stands at the crossroads. It is infested by gunmen, gamblers and criminals. These are largely outnumbered by honest citizens who stand aside and let the ruffians have their way. *The Gold Pocket* must be the organ of righteousness. It must be the center around which can rally all those who believe in law enforcement. Mr. Sibley, I want to enlist you in that cause."

The editor's voice had become a little shrill, oratorical with excitement. Boone looked at him with a wooden face. Again he asked—

"How?"

"As assistant to me in editing the paper."

The Texan's answer was immediate.

"No, thank you."

"Don't make up your mind precipitately," the editor urged. "Think it over."

"Not necessary. Yore proposition doesn't interest me."

"At least leave it open. You do not have to say no today."

"I can't leave open what never was open. I'm not a politician. I don't care who is sheriff. Why come to me? I never was inside a newspaper office."

"That doesn't matter." The editor sat up, his black eyes shining. "This is a fight, Mr. Sibley. I have put my hand to the plow. I can't turn back. What I need is a fearless man to back me up in my fight for good."

"Maybe it's yore fight. It's not mine."

"It is yours as much as mine. It is every honest, decent citizen's business to stand up for what is right."

"Dusty Rhodes to bat," announced the owner of the name genially. "What's eatin' Mr. Turley is that the bridle's off this burg an' she's kickin' up her heels every jump of the road. He gets all het up about it. Give us time, I say. Tough Nut is only a kid yet." He rose from the chair, stretched himself and announced that he was going to waltz up town to the Can Can for grub. "It's a good two-bit restaurant, Mr. Sibley. Better come along an' feed yore face."

"Reckon I will," assented the Texan.

"What I object to," the editor said by way of correction, "is cold blooded murder on our city streets, and robbery under arms, and intimidation of justice, and corruption of officials. As an American citizen—"

"As an American citizen," interrupted Riley, "you are entitled to squawk, an' you've done right considerable of it. If you had any horse sense, carryin' that pill in yore leg, you'd know when to quit. If I was you I'd sure turn my back on that plow you was so eloquentious about. I tell you straight you ain't got a lick of sense if you don't shut yore trap. I don't want to be listenin' to nice words from the preacher about you. Now I've said all I'm gonna say, to you an' this young fellow both. I aim to live long in the land myself, an' I onct knew a fellow got to be most a hundred by mindin' his own business."

"Amen!" agreed young Rhodes in his best mourners' bench voice. "Meanwhile, it's me for the Can Can to eat one of Charlie's steaks smothered in onions."

THE TWO young men walked up town together.

"So you reckon you don't want to be an editor," Rhodes said by way of getting his companion's opinion.

"Funniest proposition ever put up to me," Boone responded. "How come he to figure I might throw in with him? What's his game anyhow."

"Well sir, that's right queer. He ain't got any game, except he thinks it's his duty to bawl out the Quinn outfit an' any others ridin' crooked trails. Course, they'll bump him off one of these days. He knows it too. Scared to death, the li'l prune is, but stickin' right to the saddle."

"Why? What's the use?" asked Boone, puzzled.

Dusty looked at him, grinning slightly. "Leavin' our beautiful city tonight, Mr. Sibley?"

"No, I reckon not."

"Soon?"

"Thought I'd look around awhile. Were you aimin' to tell me that Tucson is a right lively town where I'd probably do well?"

"No, sir. But you got yore answer. You cain't see why old man Turley stays here, but you're aimin' to stay yore own self."

"Not the same. First off, I haven't been objecting to the bridle being off the town."

"No," agreed the cowboy dryly, "you jest jumped Curt French when he hadn't done a thing to you, an' that ain't supposed to be safer than throwin' a match into a keg of powder."

"An' second, if this Curt French is sore at me—well, I expect I'll be present when the band begins to play. But Turley—he'll wilt right off the earth."

"Sure he will."

"He's got no more nerve than a brush rabbit."

"That's whatever. He's plumb scared stiff half the time."

"Then why don't he light out—cut dirt for Boston, or wherever he comes from?"

"Because he's got sand in his craw—guts."

"You just said—"

"I said the goose quills run up an' down his spine every time he sees a bad man. Now I say he's the gamest bird I ever raised. You an' me—he's got us backed off the map for sand. If I was half as scared as he is I'd be in New Mexico by now an' still travelin.' No, sir. I take off my hat to him."

"I didn't cotton to him much myself."

"You wouldn't—not at first. He don't know sic 'em about this Border country. Came out for his health. Got all sorts of funny notions. He aims to gentle us an' get us saddle broke to nice ladylike ways. Yet I'll be doggoned if I don't like the li'l cuss—an' respect him. He's gonna play out his hand to a finish."

"Why don't he get you to back his play?" Boone asked.

Dusty suspected sarcasm in the question, but he grinned cheerfully.

"Me? Why, I ain't bought any chips in this game. I'm one of these here innocent bystanders. Come to that, I do a li'l hellin' around my own self onct in a while."

Boone nodded. He could believe that.

The cowboy added another reason.

"An' I don't aim to take up a residence in Boot Hill if I can help it. I don't claim everything's right in this town. It ain't. But nobody elected me to read the riot act to the bad actors."

"Meanin' the Quinn gang?"

"I'm naming no names. Here's Charlie's place. We'll sashay in an' feed us at his chuck wagon." He hung on the threshold a moment to add a word to what he had said. "But Whip an' Russ ain't a bad crowd, stranger. There's a heap worse than them in this man's town."

"An' French—have you got a gilt edged testimonial framed up for him too?" Boone asked.

The cowboy grinned.

"S-sh! Hush yore fool mouth."

CHAPTER VII

INDIRECT DISCOURSE

A THIN old man, toothless, sat in the Can Can eating a plate of flapjacks. Dusty Rhodes hailed him.

"How you makin' it, Dad?"

"Fat like a match. How's yore own corporosity sagasuate?"

"I'm ridin' high, wide an' handsome."

"Hmp! You sayin' it don't mean a thing to me. You got no ambition—none of you young riders. Give you a saddle, a quirt, spurs, a bronc, a forty-dollar job, an' onct in a while God send Sunday, an' you don't ask another thing."

"Meet Mr. Sibley," the cowboy said. "Mr. Sibley, shake hands with Mobeetie Bill. Don't ask me what his oncet name was. All I know is he lit in Cochise three jumps ahead of a posse."

"Nothin' to that, Mr. Sibley," the old man corrected. "Fact is, I skinned a jerkline string when I fust come."

"I been told he hit Texas when the Palo Duro wasn't a hole in the ground yet. No tellin' how old he is. Mebbe a hundred. Don't you believe anything this old Hassayampa* tells you, Mr. Sibley. By the way, Dad, Mr. Sibley is from yore own range."

"Not exactly, if you hail from the Panhandle," Boone said. "I come from the Brazos."

"Sit down, Texas man," the old-timer invited. To the slant eyed waiter he gave orders. "Another stack of chips. An' wait on these gents, Charlie."

They sat down, ordered, ate. Casual conversation flowed on. For the most part Boone listened. Mobeetie Bill had been a buffalo hunter. He had, in his own words, "tooken the hides off'n a heap of them." Before that he had served with the Confederate army, and prior to that with General Sam Houston. He had known the Southwest many years before barbed wire had come in to tame it.

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*The legend is that any one drinking of the waters of the Hassayampa River can not afterward tell the truth.

"Yes, sir, them was the days," he said reminiscently. "There was mighty few cutbacks in the herd when I fust come to Texas. Clever folks, most of 'em. Course there was trouble, lots of it. If you was anyways hostile you could always be accommodated. At El Paso there usta be a cottonwood at the head of a street where folks grew personal. They nailed their opinions of each other on it. Anse Mills posted three citizens as liars. That was sure fightin' talk then. Dallas Studenmire stuck there a list of bad men he aimed to kill *pronto* if they didn't light out sudden. He bumped off three-four to show good faith, an' the rest said, 'Good-by, El Paso.' Times ain't like they was. Folks either. Me, I'm nothin' but a stove up old donker."

"This country is wild enough for me right now," Rhodes said. "Four of us was jumped by 'paches last year. If it's shootings you are pinin' for, why I expect Tough Nut could accommodate you."

"Hmp! Boy, you're a kid hardly outa yore cradle. You brag about yore Quinns an' yore Curt French. Say, if they had bumped into John Wesley Hardin when he was going good or even Clay Allison our Texas killers would sure have made 'em climb a tree."

Boone observed that Rhodes looked around quickly to make sure nobody else had come into the restaurant.

"I ain't arguing with you, Dad. All I say is that when I meet the gents referred to I'm always real polite." He had, even in making this innocuous remark, lowered his voice.

"Why, some one was tellin' me on the street that some pilgrim from back East beat up yore Curt French this very damned day," Dad said belligerently.

"No need to shout it, Dad," the cowboy warned. "Old as you are, you might annoy Curt considerable if he heard you. In which case he'd take it outa either you or me, or both of us. But since you're on the subject, it wasn't any pilgrim from the East but this Texas brother of yores who mixed it with Curt today."

Mobeetie Bill's eyes glistened.

"Son, you'll do to take along, looks like. But, boy, pack yore hogleg wherever you go, or you'll sure sleep in smoke. Hell coughed up this fellow Curt French. He's a sure enough killer, an' he trails with a fightin' bunch."

"You're certainly gabby today, Dad," Rhodes protested mildly. "A young fellow like you had ought to learn to keep his trap shut."

The old-timer paid no attention to the cowboy. He addressed himself to his fellow Texan.

"If you're a false alarm you better cut dirt *pronto*."

"For Tucson?" Boone asked gravely.

Dusty grinned.

"Mr. Sibley has been told two-three times already that Tucson is a right good town an' the wagon tracks are plain headin' thataway."

"Correct," agreed the old buffalo hunter. "That's good advice, Texas man, an' it don't cost a cent Mex."

"Good advice for any one that wants to take it," amended Boone.

Mobeetie Bill looked into his cool, flinty eyes.

"Correct once more. Good for any one but a fightin' fool, an' maybe for him too. If I get this Curt French right he'll aim to make Tough Nut hotter'n Hades with the blower on for you. He'll likely get lit up with tarantula juice an' go gunnin' with a pair of six-shooters. Like enough he'll take two-three Quinns along when he starts to collect."

"Cheerful news," commented the young Texan. "He seems to be some lobo wolf."

"Prob'ly you could get a job freightin' up Prescott way, thereby throwin' two stones at one bird."

"Right now I'll throw my stones, if any, at birds in Tough Nut. For a day or two, anyhow, while I look around."

Mobeetie Bill let out a soft pedaled version of the old rebel yell.

"You're shoutin', boy. That's the way folks talked in the good old days. Make this tinhorn climb a tree."

Rhodes spoke quickly, in a low voice. "*Chieto, compadre!*"

Men passed the window of the restaurant. A moment later they came in, two of them. Instantly Boone recognized them as two of the men who had been with French at the time of his difficulty with the gambler. They took seats at a small table in a corner of the room. As they moved across the floor the Texan saw again that they were big and rangy. An arrogant self-confidence rode their manner.

"Brad Prouty an' Russ Quinn," murmured Rhodes.

The buffalo hunter bridged any possible silence the entry of the newcomers might have made. His voice flowed on as though he had been in the midst of narrative:

"— made camp in a grove of cottonwoods on White Deer creek that night. I rec'lect I was mixin' up a batch of cush* when a fellow rode up with his horse in a lather. The Cheyennes were swarmin' over the country, he claimed. They had burned his ranch, an' he had jest saved his hide. Well, sir, we headed for 'Dobe Walls an' got there right after the big fight Billy Dixon an' the other boys had there with about a thousand Injuns. That's how clost I come to being in the 'Dobe Walls battle."

"Was you in the War of 1812, Dad?" asked Rhodes with innocent malice.

The old man shook a fleshless fist at him.

"I ain't so old but what I could take you to a cleanin' right now, boy," he boasted. "Trouble with you young sprouts is you never was wore to a frazzle with a hickory limb when you needed it most."

Dusty slapped his thigh with a brown hand.

"Dawged if I don't believe you'd climb my frame for four bits," he chuckled.

"Make it two bits. Make it a plug of tobacco," Dad cackled with a toothless grin.

QUINN and Prouty ordered supper and ate. Russ, facing Boone, said something to his companion in a low voice. Brad turned and stared at Sibley. The young Texan, apparently absorbed in what his friends were saying, endured the look without any evidence that he knew he was the object of attention.

"Curt's right. Population of this town too promiscuous," Russ said, not troubling to lower his voice.

"That's whatever, Russ. Ought to be thinned out."

"Good thing if some emigrated. Good for the town. Good for them." Through narrowed lids slits of eyes watched Boone. "If I was a friend of some of these pilgrims I'd tell 'em to hive off for other parts—kinda ease outa the scenery, as you might say."

Making notes of these men without seeming to see them, Boone took in the lean shoulders, muscular and broad, of Russell Quinn, his close clamped jaw, a certain catlike litheness in the carriage of his body. Brad Prouty was heavier and shorter of build, a hairier man. His mouth was a thin cruel line below the drooping mustache. It might be guessed that Brad was of a sullen disposition, given to the prompt assertion of what he considered his rights.

"Yep, slap a saddle on a broomtail an' light out. I'd sure call that good medicine." This from Prouty.

Quinn took up the refrain:

"Sometimes a guy has a li'l luck an' presses it too far. I've seen that happen se-ve-re-al times. Don't know when to lay down a hand. Boot Hill for them right soon. Nobody's fault but their own."

Into this antiphony Boone interjected a remark, addressed apparently to Mobeetie Bill, in an even level voice.

"Yes, like I was sayin', I like yore town. Reckon I'll camp here a while.

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*Cush was made of soaked corn bread and biscuit, stirred together and fried in bacon grease.

Lots of work, an' folks seem friendly an' sociable."

The old hunter strangled a snort.

"Well, they are an' they ain't. Don't you bank on that good feelin' too much."

"Oh, I'll take it as it comes," Boone answered carelessly.

It occurred to Mobeetie Bill, looking at this tall lean young man, with cool sardonic blue gray eyes in the sunburned face, that he was competent to look after himself.

"If you stay it's on yore own responsibility," Dusty Rhodes chipped in.

The cowboy's eyes were shining. This byplay took his fancy. If the odds had not been so great he would have been willing to take a long shot bet on Sibley's chances.

"Well, yes," drawled Boone. "I eat an' sleep an' live on my own responsibility. Fact is, I've been hittin' too fast a clip. I kinda want to rest awhile in a nice quiet peaceable town like this. Two churches here already, an' another headin' this way they say. Nice li'l schoolhouse on Prospect Street. First class climate. Good live newspaper."

It was Russ who took up the refrain on the part of the other table.

"That's right, come to think of it, nobody been buried in Boot Hill for a week. Liable to be some one soon—some guy who blows in an' wants to show he's a bad man from Bitter Creek. Well, here's hopin'. Shove the salt thisaway, Brad."

"So a quiet young fellow like me, trying to get along, lookin' for no trouble an' expectin' none, had orta do well here," Boone went on placidly.

What Dusty Rhodes thought was, "You durned ol' horn toad, you sure have got sand in your craw." What he said was, "I can get you a job on a ranch in the Chiricahuas, above the San Simon, forty dollars per if you're a top hand with a rope."

"Maybe I'll take you up later. No rush. I reckon the cows will calve in the spring, same as usual," Boone said nonchalantly.

"I'll be rockin' along thataway in a day or two. Like to have yore company," Rhodes insisted.

"Oh, well, we'll see."

Dusty Rhodes paid the bill, insisting that it was his treat. His guests reached for their hats and sauntered out.

Russ Quinn spoke a word as the cowboy was leaving. Dusty Rhodes turned and went back to the table. A minute later he joined Sibley and the old buffalo hunter outside.

"What'd he want?" asked Mobeetie Bill.

"Wanted I should get this yere durn fool pilgrim outa the neighborhood before Curt qualified him for his private graveyard."

"Kind of him," Boone said with mild sarcasm.

Dusty had his own point of view.

"Russ is no crazy killer. Course he'll gun a guy if he has to, but he's not lookin' for a chance. I reckon he'd like to see you light out for yore own sake."

They walked along the roaring street. Already it was filled with lusty good natured life. Men jostled each other as they crowded in and out of the gambling halls. Sunburned cowboys, sallow miners, cold-eyed tinhorns, dusty freighters and prosperous merchants were out for amusement. Inside the variety halls and the saloons gaudily dressed women drank with the customers and offered their smiles to prospective clients. But outside, none of the weaker sex showed themselves on Apache Street. Rich man, poor man, beggarman, thief—they crowded one another impartially in democratic simplicity. One was as good as another. All were embryonic millionaires, sure that the blind goddess Luck would strike them soon.

Whatever else it was, Tough Nut was a man's town.

CHAPTER VIII

TROUBLE IN THE HILLS

BOONE was not looking for trouble, but he was warily ready for it. He and his companions wandered through Jefford's and the Golden Eagle. They took a flyer at the wheel in Dolan's

Palace. They watched a stud game running at the Last Chance.

More than one man recognized Boone and out of the corner of his mouth murmured something to his nearest neighbor. The Texan's face was impassive, his manner indifferent. He seemed to be negligently at ease. But his cool eyes carried to him all the information they could gather. They searched out the personnel of every crowd. When swing doors were pushed open they were aware of who entered. Each gambler's face was noted and dismissed.

His business was to show himself in public, briefly, at several places, to put at rest any question of his being in hiding. This was not bravado. It was an insurance policy, by no means bullet proof, against attack. For if Curt French suspected that Boone was afraid of him he would certainly begin burning powder when they met.

The Texan did not invite a challenge. He stayed away from the Occidental, where French was most likely to be found. A visit to Whip Quinn's place at present would be considered in the nature of a defiance, and Boone had no desire to stir up the wild animals. There was always a possibility, though from what he heard about Curt he judged it slight, that if he did not meet the man too soon the fellow's simmering wrath might not explode. The Quinns might talk him out of an attempt at reprisal.

It was still early, as Tough Nut judged time, when Boone went back to his room at the Dallas House. He rolled and smoked a cigaret meditatively. Certainly it was hard luck that within five minutes of his arrival in town he had made an enemy of a bad *hombre* like Curt French and had fallen tentatively into disfavor with the Quinns. They would be a hard combination to buck against. He could not run away. That was not consistent with his code. But he would stand back and sidestep trouble unless it were forced on him.

He went to bed and was asleep within five minutes.

SUNLIGHT was streaming into the room when he awoke. He dressed, breakfasted and walked the quiet streets as he went about his business of feeding the team and disposing of the supplies he had brought to the camp. French was a night owl, as gamblers are, and the chances were that he would not be seen till afternoon. None the less Boone went cautiously. The fellow might surprise him.

Noon passed. The sun moved westward and sank lower. Twice Boone saw some of the Quinn crowd. Once Whip and Brad, at a distance, came down Apache Street and disappeared into the Occidental. Later he passed Russ and another big dark man standing on a street corner. Some one spoke to the second man, calling him Sing.

Russ looked bleakly at Boone.

"Still here?" he said.

"Still here," Boone answered curtly.

Just before supper time Dusty Rhodes came to Boone with news.

"I saw Doc Peters li'l while ago. Whaja think? Curt's down with the measles."

"Measles?"

"Yep." The cowboy grinned. "Got 'em bad. He's in bed an' liable to stay there three-four days. Kinda funny, a big elephant like Curt gettin' a kid disease like the measles."

For Boone this was good news, unless it were a trap to throw him off his guard.

"What kind of a fellow is this Doc Peters? Stand in with the Quinn gang, does he?"

"No, sir. He's a good doctor, educated 'way up, an' he's straight as a string. Any one will tell you he's a good citizen."

"Find out from him how sick French is, will you?"

"Bet yore boots. Say, what about that Chiricahua proposition we was talkin' about. No use stickin' around waitin' for Curt to get well enough to bump you off. I'm for being accommodatin', but there's sure a limit."

"I'll throw in with you if you'll wait two-three days."

Dusty hesitated.

"Looky here, fellow, I like yore style. But let's git down to cases. The Quinns are our friends—us fellows up in the hills. Kinda mutual give an' take. 'Nough said. I cain't plumb throw 'em down. I'm figurin' to get you outa town before the earthquake."

"Suits me fine," agreed Boone, smiling. "But I've got business here for a coupla days. After that I'm with you."

"You don't figure on havin' a rumpus with any of the Quinn outfit?" the cowboy asked cautiously.

"Not none, unless some of 'em ride me."

"All right," conceded Dusty reluctantly. "But why wait two days? You want to show you ain't scared, I reckon."

"That's about it. Just like a kid," Boone admitted.

But he knew that his reason ran deeper than vanity. He was staying a reasonable time partly out of self respect, partly because he knew that a man in trouble is always safer if he puts on a bold front.

Dusty took occasion to drop around to the Occidental for a word with its owner. He found Whip Quinn making measurements with a carpenter for an addition of an ell at the rear of the house to enlarge its capacity.

The cowpuncher had come for a definite purpose, but he stood around rather awkwardly trying to find a way to make what he was about to say sound casual.

Whip anticipated him.

"Hear you've found a new friend, Dusty."

The cowboy met the hard stare of the gambler.

"Looks thataway," he admitted, somewhat disconcerted. "I kinda like the guy. It was about him I wanted to speak to you."

"I'm listenin'," Whip said briefly.

"Sibley is not lookin' for trouble. It was sorta wished on him."

"I was there at the time. Not necessary to explain it to me."

"That's right," agreed Rhodes. "Well, all I wanted to say was that he's leavin' for the hills right soon."

"When?"

"In a day or so. He's got some business to finish."

"Did he ask you to tell me that?"

"No-o, he didn't."

"Well, if he's not huntin' trouble he'd better light out before Curt is around again. You can tell him that from me."

The cowboy did not carry this message. He was afraid it might have the opposite of the desired effect. Sibley would not let himself be run out of town or driven out by fear of consequences.

BOONE sold his team and bought a cow pony. His saddle he had brought with him in the wagon. When at last the two were fairly on the road Dusty took a deep breath of relief. He was reckless enough himself and had come out of more than one scrape during which guns had blazed. But he liked this Texan, and he was convinced that if Boone stayed in town it would be only a few days until Curt French would force the issue and the Quinns would be drawn in. Under which circumstances his new friend would not have a rabbit's chance.

They rode through the grama-grass into the golden dawn of the desert. Before them were the jigsaw mountains bare and brown. In that uncertain light they had a curious papier-mâché effect, as though they had been built for stage scenery.

The riders descended into a valley blue and pink with alfilaria. The season was spring. There had been plenty of winter rain and the country bloomed. The brilliant flowers of the cacti were all about them; the prickly pear and the ocatilla in scarlet bloom; the sahuaro, great candelabra lighted as it were with yellow flame. Here and there in the chaparral were florescent buckthorn and manzanita.

They came upon a pair of burros picketed out and close to them the camp of a pair of prospectors. The old fellows were typical desert rats, unshaven, ragged, and dust grimed.

Young Rhodes gave a shout.

"Look who we've jumped this glad mo'ning—old Toughfoot Bozeman an'

Hassayampa Pete. What do you-all gravel scratchers figure on findin' down in the flats here?"

The eyes of one of the old-timers twinkled.

"'Lowed to run acrost a stray jackass or two maybe."

His partner took the question more seriously.

"We been in the Chiricahuas lookin' around. Nothin' there. We're headin' for the Dragoons. You better quit hellin' around an' go to prospectin' yore own self, young fellow."

"Meet Mr. Sibley, from Texas, gents. No, I ain't got the patience to spend all my time diggin' graveyards for my hopes. Me, I'll stick to cows."

"Yore own, or some one else's?" Pete asked innocently. Then, lest this sound too pointed, he added: "You young galoots got jest about brains enough to head off a steer hightailin' acrost the desert. Well, go to it, boy. I'll buy you a ranch when we've done made our strike."

The two young men left the prospectors packing their outfit.

"We'll get outa the flats soon," Dusty promised.

Beyond the valley they climbed into the foothills and jogged along for hours, gradually working higher as the trail wound in and out of arroyos and small cañons. On the sleepy shoulder of a ridge spur they unsaddled to rest their horses.

Dusty shot a rattlesnake.

"First I've seen this year," he said. "Almost stepped on it as I come round that niggerhead."

They lay down and chatted disjointedly. Their talk was of the common subjects that interested Arizona. They mentioned the rains and the good grass and how fat cattle were. They wondered whether the Apaches would soon break out again. Both of them knew that Cochise County was the home of scores of rustlers who were engaged in running stock across the Border from Mexico. But that was a subject best not discussed by strangers, and these two young men were scarcely more than that. All that Boone knew of his companion was that he seemed a friendly, likable youth. No doubt he was a wild buckaroo. Left an orphan at an early age, he had scrambled up without training or family traditions. What his reaction toward honesty might be Boone did not know. But the Texan noted that Dusty gave no details of his manner of life. He did not name his employer, if he had one; nor did he say anything of a ranch and brand of his own.

There were few cattle ranches and these as yet not well stocked. The Mexican line was close, and beyond it were the haciendas of señors rich in land and cattle. It was an easy though risky undertaking to slip across to Sonora, round up a bunch of cows and drive them into Arizona in the dark of the moon. The ranchers on the San Pedro and the Sulphur Springs valley asked few questions as to length of ownership. They "bought at a whack-up" and were glad to stock their range at a low price. If the local market was glutted the rustlers hid the cattle in small mountain parks, changed the brands and drove a herd to some of the Government posts which needed beef for the Indians on reservations.

THE TWO young men resaddled and took up again the trail for the uplands. They were now in a rough country. The arroyos had become gulches, the hills mountains. The cholla and palo verde had given place to scrub pine and juniper. The riders followed a tortuous path. They climbed stiff shale ascents and dropped down precipitous pitches.

To them drifted the sound of a shot, faint and far.

"Box Cañon over thataway," explained Dusty. "Back of it the McLennon ranch."

Another shot came to them, and after it the popping of four or five more explosions, much as though some one were setting off firecrackers.

The riders drew up to listen. For a few moments there was silence; then again, another cracker went *plop*. Presently, like a muffled echo of it, a duller report reached their ears.

Dusty looked at his companion.

"Trouble, sounds like. Rifles an' six-shooters both. We better head that-away."

The Texan nodded. Neither of them said anything about the need for caution, but instinctively they left the draw they were ascending and put their horses to the steep hillside. Both wanted to see as soon as possible those who were shooting. There was a good deal less chance of riding into a trap from a hilltop than from a gulch.

While they were still climbing to the ridge other shots sounded. These were louder than the others. Boone judged that the riflemen were moving rapidly nearer. Oddly enough, both men knew that what they heard was not the exuberance of youth making a noise to express itself. This firing meant battle, the spit of deadly bullets, the sinister whistle of death screaming on its way. How they knew it neither could have told; perhaps by some sixth sense given to those who tread wild and dangerous trails.

From the summit they looked down on a hill pocket of mesquite terminating in a rocky wall. Three men lay crouched in the brush behind such shelter as they could find. Fifty yards in front of them was another. His body lay huddled face down where he had fallen.

The men were trapped. That was clear enough. But even from the height where Boone stood it took him some seconds to find any of the assailants. They too had taken such cover as the draw afforded. Presently the sun glinted on the barrel of a rifle, though no man was visible behind it. A puff of smoke some distance to the right showed him where another squatted. His eyes picked out a third behind the trunk of a twisted mesquite. There were others of course hidden in the chaparral. In the distance a bunch of cattle could be seen grazing.

"Our boys," Dusty cried, his voice shrill from excitement. "They've got one of 'em."

Already he was sliding from the saddle, rifle in hand. Boone followed his example and took refuge behind a low broad oak. But the Texan did not imitate him in his next move. For Dusty, from behind another live oak, took careful aim and fired at the man back of the twisted mesquite.

The man jumped up and ran for the shelter of a wash. Boone made a discovery. He was a Mexican in tight trousers and big sombrero.

There was quick excited speech. A second man broke for the wash and a bullet sang past him as he scudded for safety. Then Boone saw two men moving cautiously through the brush. They too were heading for the wash. All of them were Mexicans.

"We've got 'em runnin'," Dusty shouted to those below.

A moment later a compact group of men, on horseback, clambered out of the wash, on the far side, and rode away at a gallop. They broke formation, scattered and circled the cattle. Dusty let out an exultant, "Hi Yi!"

TO BE CONTINUED

Admiralty Orders

A Story of the Undersea Fighting Boats

By HAROLD BRADLEY SAY

A QUICK shiver ran through Lieutenant Commander Turner Baxter, captain of His Majesty's submarine *E-31*, as his head and shoulders pushed up out of the warm foul air below into the biting chill of the North Sea. He straightened up on the little conning tower bridge, pulled his muffler tighter and uttered a perfunctory oath.

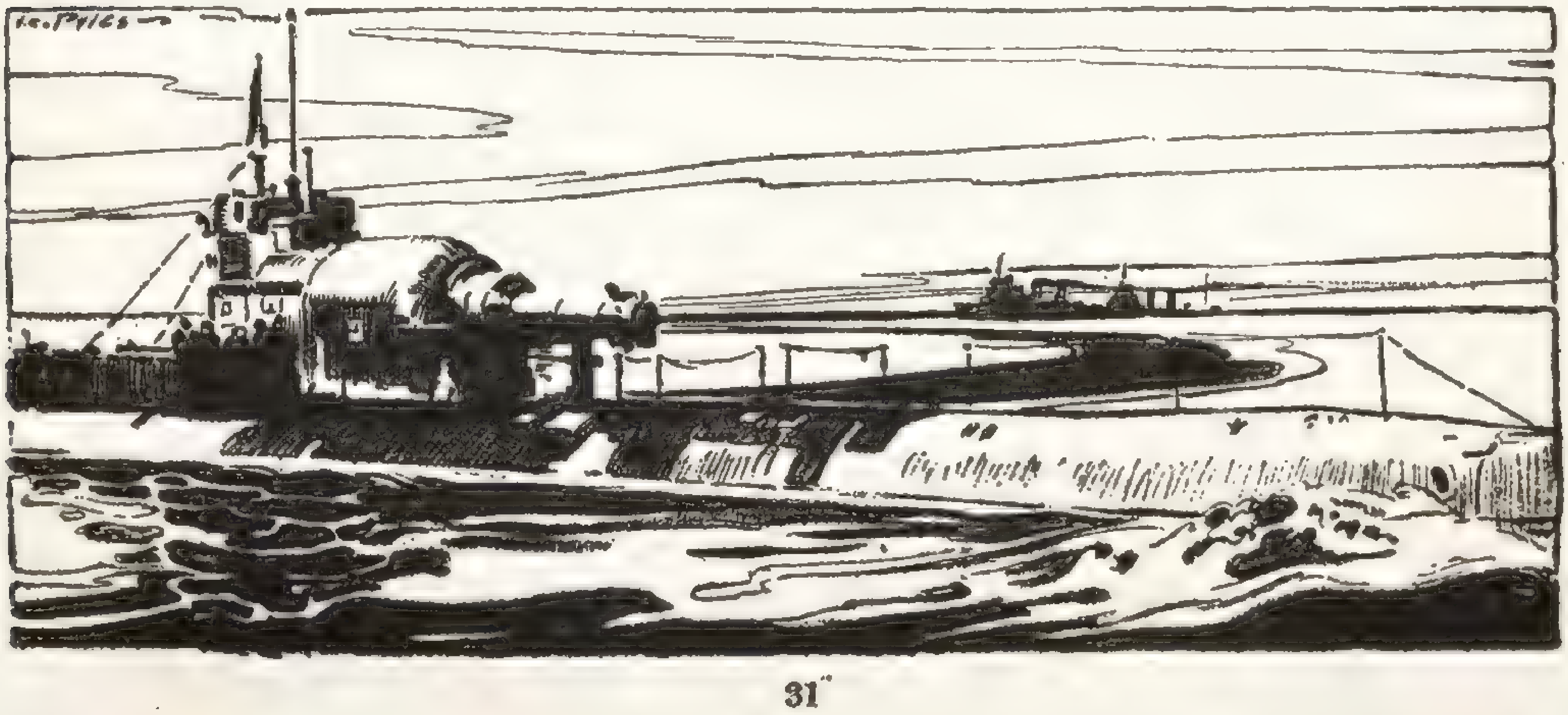
"Beastly weather as usual!" he commented to his navigating officer, Lieutenant John Davis, R.N.R., a stocky, weather hardened veteran of the merchant marine who had gone to subs as the answer to his country's call.

"Rotten," agreed Lieutenant Davis cheerfully, "but better than staying underneath with the walls sweating and the air so foul a cigaret won't burn."

The coxswain was on the bridge shipping his gyrorepeater preparatory to continuing his steering from above.

The gray seas with their curling white tops were running with the boat, which kept the bridge from being under a continuous shower of pelting spray and pieces of sea. Occasionally one slapped sullenly at the hull of the underwater boat slipping along through the seas on her Diesels while she charged her batteries for future use when on her motors after diving. A thick gray mist that rose like a vapor from the water hemmed in the white capped world around the *E-31*. A few hundred yards off at any angle the sea faded into the damp shroud.

Davis and the coxswain had been in subs too long to have to be told to keep a sharp eye for anything that might break through that mist right on top of *E-31*.



This was the boat's fourth day of beating up and down her ten mile patrol off the Helgoland bight in weather misty and squally by turns. Not a thing had she seen in those four days of limited visibility. A battle fleet might have gone by her a mile away and she could not have seen it. Her two previous trips out on patrol had been the same.

"It's getting me—this kind of weather," growled Lieutenant Commander Baxter between two sets of even white teeth that clamped down on the stem of a rakish little briar pipe. "A beastly way to do one's bit, bouncing around in a pea pod with nothing to get but the rheumatism." The young sub commander—he was but twenty-eight—jammed his hands down tighter in his coat pockets.

Lieutenant Davis mechanically pressed a charge into a stained and much charred pipe bowl. He surveyed the sub's commander as he did so. Baxter was a tall, ruddy faced fellow who looked as if he should belong to a university cricket team. There was an eager, zestful light about his dark eyes. He showed few signs that the life of a submarine commander was one of unending strain and worry. The fact that it was just that was one reason why he loved it, although he himself would not have given that reason.

DAVIS struck a match to his pipe, drew in a heavy breath of fragrant smoke, exhaled it with a satisfied sigh, then replied to the sub captain's grumblings.

"There you go again," he jibed good naturedly. "Man, if they were to transfer you to a nice dry battleship you'd grouse like an old cab driver. Why, you'd worry and fuss like a caged bird."

Baxter grinned. He had been in subs since the start of the war. A half dozen times he could have transferred out to softer berths. He loved the game. Moreover, his was a soul that chafed under restraint. He was more or less his own dictator in submarines. There was nobody standing about watching every move one made. There was a fraternity in an underwater boat different than any existing in surface craft.

"Can't I bellyache a bit without your trying to argue with me?" he growled at Davis in mock seriousness. "And by the by, didn't I hear you grousing around the other night because it was your wife's birthday and you were bobbing about off Helgoland in this tin box?"

The reminder sent Davis' mind across the waters to a little cottage up near Romsey.

"Well," he countered, and there was a half mournful note in his words, "with me it's different, you know. I'm a merchant man. All this tosh and the like on battleships I don't fancy. Aboard a sub it's different. One does his business without a lot of parade and show. When I first went in, it used to—"

Davis stopped talking, looked out across the seas and pointed.

"I believe this damn' mist's opening ahead," he announced. "Sure enough it is."

Baxter's eyes swept in the misty sullen ocean that reached off on all sides.

"Right-o!" he exclaimed. "We ought to be able to see a little before we drop down on the bottom tonight."

Where all the world had been shut off beyond a few hundred yards, it opened up, a vast expanse of gray heaving ocean.

Baxter leaned over the hatch top.

"Keep alive below there!" he called down. "It's clearing up. May want to dive quick."

"Yes, sir," came the voice of Sub-Lieutenant Wilkins, a twenty-one year old navy officer with the weight of the world bearing down on his shoulders. The second in command on a sub invariably takes his duties as seriously as an admiral.

As night approached the ocean became more sullen. The gray, white topped waves slapped a little harder at *E-31's* sleek steel sides as the boat glided through the water like a giant porpoise plunging along on the surface with only its back out of the water.

"We'll dive at six o'clock," announced Baxter.

As he spoke he swept around the horizon with his big binoculars. He had covered the entire circle and was swinging around again when his hands tightened on the glasses and he looked long and sharply ahead and slightly off the starboard bow.

"Cruisers!" he cried. "Destroyer screens and coming fast."

He jumped over the hatch top. Davis had fastened his glasses on the blurs momentarily standing out more clearly in the darkening mists ahead.

"ACTION stations!" Baxter shouted down the hatch.

"Action stations, sir!" echoed a voice from below, where men were springing to diving controls and to the torpedo tubes whose shining faces twinkled silently under the electric lights.

"I'll call Sparks," snapped Davis in a tone that was half a question, half a statement.

"No!" snapped Baxter sharply. "Down below quick! Going to dive under the screen for one of those cruisers. Mist's setting in heavy again. Nearly dark anyway. We'll take a chance on signaling afterwards."

Davis shot a quick, questioning glance at his commander. He hesitated at the edge of the hatch.

"Down! Lively!" jerked Baxter, gathering up odd gear.

The coxswain was half down the little ladder with the gyrorepeater and other gear.

Davis shot down the hatch. Baxter cast one more sharp glance through the mist, then leaped down the hatch, pressing the klaxon button as he slammed the lid.

E-31 had been thumping along at surface trim on her Diesels. As the horn blared out its insistent warning throughout the inside of the boat quick commands shot out from the control room. Men worked wheels and valves.

A rush of air and gurgling inpouring water marked the opening of the vents. The Diesels had been stopped and the electric motors started in their place in a matter of seconds. Down canted *E-31's* nose as the coxswain spun his wheel. Down, down she went.

"Fifteen, twenty, thirty—forty," sang out the man at the gage.

All internal noises had stopped now. Only the soft musical hum of the electric motors, the low rhythmic clicking of the gyrorepeaters, and a stewing in the air lines.

There came a rumbling, rising note from off to starboard. It swelled and filled every compartment of *E-31*. Directly overhead it passed, then died away. Destroyer propellers. Every man guessed that.

E-31 pushed slowly on.

Men who had stood with strained ears and eyes that feared lest a roar overhead and a rush of water through the steel walls would mark a German depth bomb's message, breathed easier.

"Didn't see me!" said Baxter succinctly. "I knew they didn't."

Davis nodded.

Again the roar from the propellers of screening destroyers rumbled through the underwater boat and died out.

"Up to eighteen!" snapped Baxter. "Quick!"

Up canted *E-31's* nose.

"Not a foot above eighteen," cautioned Baxter, pressing his face to the periscope eyepiece and setting his hand on the raising gear. The long tube crept upward.

No talking in the boat now. Subdued whispers floated back through the tunnel from forward where Sub-Lieutenant Wilkins and the torpedo instructor with their crew hovered over the tubes. Men glanced confidently up from their own work to the faces of their companions at other posts. In subs, each man knows that his life and those of all his mates may rest in the hands of one of his companions. The slightest error, the smallest mistake at a critical moment and it is the end for all. Their boat becomes a common coffin.

Most of all, they regarded the boat's captain. He alone through the periscope knew what went on above. If he made the slightest mistake, if he—but then he wouldn't. Confidently they waited. Up, up crept the periscope. It was nearly out of the water now. Baxter's eyes were glued fast against the glass.

"I suppose I ought not to have done this before signaling," he muttered to Davis at his side. "Against Admiralty orders, you know. But . . ."

BAXTER crouched closer over the periscope. The captain's mind was out in the gathering mist and darkness where, momentarily drawing closer, gray masses ploughed westward.

"Steer eighty!" he snapped.

He jerked down the periscope. The coxswain twirled his wheel.

The steering chains rattled. All felt the quick turn of the boat. *E-31* swung around to deliver her deadly blows. Baxter's face was tense and grim. Triumphant and bright, the light of a hunter gleamed from his eyes.

"When I let go the first one, be ready to dive at once," he cautioned Davis, "but don't dive unless I command. When I say dive, go to eighty feet and go quick."

"Right, sir," repeated Davis calmly. "Eighty feet when we dive."

Again their periscope stole upward. Less than a thousand yards off the port bow of *E-31* a gray monster ploughed through the choppy seas. Hardly three hundred yards astern, trailed a second cruiser who had trusted too much in her screening force of destroyers.

It was deadly still in *E-31*. Eyes were glued to meters and gages, hands tensed on switches and valves.

Baxter raised his hand, all the while keeping his eyes tight to the periscope.

"Steady all!" he cried as his first target moved into its fatal position.

"Port bow—fire!"

The boat quivered to the release of the big torpedo. Down snapped the periscope.

"Steer sixty!" shouted Baxter.

Even while the submarine was swinging around, its walls reverberated with a muffled crash. Every man of *E-31* knew that the first torpedo had found its mark. Up shot the periscope with Baxter crouched tightly over it.

"Fire!" he shouted almost at the moment the long tube stuck its end out of the North sea.

Again the slight tremble as the torpedo left the tube and water rushed in to fill the space it left.

"Eighty feet!" cried Baxter. "They're turning loose on us! Flood the auxiliary."

As she started down another muffled roar shook the walls of *E-31*. Instantaneously came a second terrific explosion.

"His magazine!" cried Baxter.

Then came other sounds from above where shells from the first hit cruiser were plopping harmlessly down into the ocean. *E-31's* course took her almost under the spot where the second cruiser had been before it was hit.

"Full speed," ordered Baxter. "We've got to get out of here and get a message off to Admiralty. It's so thick above that we won't have any trouble—if we're lucky."

Ten minutes later *E-31*, at surface trim, that is, hanging on by her vents and ready to do a "crash" dive in nothing flat, had her wireless gear up and was ripping a message out to the fleet stating the direction the German cruiser division and destroyers were headed. How many had gone on Baxter did not know.

There were happy, victorious gleams in the eyes and faces of the men and officers of *E-31* as she glided along at patrol depth a few minutes later. They joked, laughed and sang despite the effect that stuffy, half poisoned air and cramped positions have upon humans used to breathing and moving about in the open. For the men, two bottles of rum were broken out. Baxter, Davis and Wilkins did the customary thing with a bottle of champagne kept in the hope of just such an occasion.

BUT FOUR days later at the base where *E-31* lay alongside her mother ship, it was a gloomy crew, sullen and silent, that moved about at harbor work. Each felt worse than if he himself had been humiliated and punished without cause.

"A bloomin', unrighteous shame, I calls it." This from Barkley, a grizzled, gray haired old regular who was *E-31's* chief engineroom artificer.

The leading torpedo man, a product of the new war time navy, agreed.

"Rotten deal. That's the reward a man with initiative and judgment of his own gets. Hauled up on the carpet, then relieved of command because he didn't do things by the count the way some gold braided old graybeards laid down."

It had leaked out to every member of the crew what had taken place in the office of the captain of the *Shepherdess*, mother ship of the flotilla to which *E-31* belonged.

"You knew the order—that it was supposed to be kept inviolate," the captain of the *Shepherdess* had chided Lieutenant Commander Baxter, not unkindly. "You should have signaled first, then attacked if there were still opportunity. Otherwise, had you been unable to come up and get a message off to Admiralty—the whole German high seas fleet might have got out unannounced. No one can tell what might happen under those circumstances, how many ships we might have lost, how many might have been killed in port bombardments and the like. You can see there was reason for the order."

Baxter nodded glumly.

"But, Captain," he repeated again, "it was thick and getting dark. I knew that I'd be able to get a messsage off afterwards. I knew that if I didn't dive just when I did that I'd never get a shot at the beggars."

The *Shepherdess'* captain nodded sympathetically.

"I understand," he said in a friendly way. "You did a remarkable piece of work. A highly valuable bit of service. These are the first fighting craft we've had a whack at in months. One disabled and towed into port; the other sunk. Wonderful work, Baxter, and I'm only carrying out instructions when I reprimand you. I hope you'll see it that way. The Admiralty is a stickler for discipline at all costs. I think it would like to compliment you, even decorate you, but it feels that you must be made an example."

The captain hesitated, visibly embarrassed.

"Let's have it all at once, sir," urged Baxter with a note of mingled humiliation and resentment.

"Well, you're to be relieved of command of *E-31* and assigned to port duty taking out new boats on trial trips. You'll report to the base commander this afternoon. I am sorry, Baxter—really, old man."

The *Shepherdess'* captain reached out his hand to Baxter who took it mechanically.

"Hope you have no ill feeling toward me, Baxter," concluded the captain as the ex-commander of *E-31* started to pick up his cap.

"Not at all," spoke Baxter quietly, trying to hide the hurt and humiliation that was written in his face.

An hour later, he was bidding goodby to Davis, his navigator, and Wilkins, his sub-lieutenant. Few words were spoken as Baxter gripped the hands of the two subordinates who would have followed him anywhere with all odds against them

"And," concluded Davis quietly, "if you ever get a chance to draft me to your command anywhere again, please remember me."

There was deep earnestness in the words of the ex-merchant marine man, several years senior to Baxter.

"That goes for me, too," put in Sub-Lieutenant Wilkins quickly.

Baxter swallowed hard.

"That's mighty fine of both of you to ask that." There was a wistful smile on his face as he spoke. "It's not likely I'll have many chances in the service from now on."

He stepped toward the gangway that

led across the back of another submarine, then up the side of the *Shepherdess.* He turned for a last short look. Standing about in silent little knots on the top of the submarine were most of *E-31's* crew, there to watch their captain leave.

"Cheerio," called Baxter with a quick wave of his hand, then hurried around a corner of the *Shepherdess'* deckhouse and out of sight.

Muttering indignantly, members of *E-31's* crew scattered back to their various duties.

"Wonder who they'll send to command her?" mused Davis soberly.

"I wonder," echoed Wilkins, staring in the direction that Baxter had gone.

The same thought filled the mind of every member of the crew.

THE MONTHS rolled by with the same unending grind for the members of the North Sea patrol. Ten days or more of beating up and down a patrol lane, dodging destroyers, diving from Zeppelins, living on air fresh or foul, depending on whether the sea was smooth enough to allow surface running and whether absence of the enemy permitted. Days in port. Letters from home. Occasionally a brief furlough, then the monotonous, nerve wearing work all over.

From the shipyards every week slid new hulls of merchant ships, surface fighting craft and submarines to replace lost tonnage and to prevent the enemy's increasing destruction of merchant vessels by submarines.

Week after week Lieutenant Turner Baxter, a disheartened, discouraged officer of the service, went out on test runs with new products of the submarine shipbuilding ways. Some captains with leanings toward shore stations would have regarded the post of trial captain as a promotion. It might justly have been looked on as such by many. Baxter loved his *E-31* and crew better than anything in the world. The Admiralty knew his ability. That was why it had been able to accomplish two things at once, namely, punish him for violation of orders and at the same time obtain an officer thoroughly qualified for the post of trial trip commander. Defects and faults are bad enough in any craft. They are particularly critical in a fighting craft, and more than likely fatal in a submarine. They must be detected and immediately rectified.

A new E-type boat with improvements that war time experience had brought about lay at the foot of a fitting out dock awaiting its first run. A crew, part of which had never been in submarines before but had trained in sheds where valves, switches and other gear were painted on the boards for practise work, was assembled aboard the boat.

IT WAS a cold, late October morning. A heavy, dull haze shut out the sun. Lieutenant Commander Baxter pulled a muffler tighter around his neck, lighted a cigaret and stepped down the gangway from the dock where he had been standing alone staring moodily out across the oily waters of the harbor. Talking and joking, ten or more civilians were cramped in on her little bridge. A half dozen more were below deck crowding about in the limited room of the underwater craft. There were overseers, foremen, electrical machinery experts, the yard manager, a dozen caulkers and a Diesel engine expert.

The new boat's captain-to-be was bent over the entrance of the conning tower hatch conversing busily with some one below. This was to be his first command. He was a bit nervous and considerably excited.

Baxter started down the ladder.

"All right," he called tonelessly. "Let's cast off."

The boat's young captain called out commands. Hawsers and mooring cables splashed in the water. A telegraph clanged somewhere in the vitals below and water churned under her stern. The boat began to back away from the dock.

A commotion rose on the bridge. Several hands pointed up the dock face to a gate from whence a uniformed messenger came running at top speed and shouting excitedly.

"Stop her!" commanded Baxter.

The telegraph clanged again, the engines stopped, then started forward to overcome the boat's sternway.

"Lieutenant Commander Baxter!" shouted the messenger.

Baxter looked up sharply.

"Right here," he snapped vexedly. "What is it?"

"You're to wait for Rear Admiral Harker, sir," panted the messenger. "His orders."

The impassive lines of Baxter's face changed quickly to a frown of annoyance.

He didn't like shore superiors along on these trips, admirals least of all. Why couldn't they stay in their offices where they belonged? He saw red every time an admiral hove in sight. Hadn't one of these gold braided old wiseacres taken away his *E-31* and slammed him on this job just because he had used his head? They didn't believe any one under them had brains of a capacity approaching theirs.

"Make her fast again," he called out, then muttered some uncomplimentary opinions about admirals in general.

A few moments later a tall uniformed figure walked down the dock front with a dignified, military step. His face was impassive with a maze of deepening lines that spoke of long years in his profession. Little downshoots of gray hair showed under the edges of his visored cap. A pair of eyes that were blue and critical seemed to take in everything at once.

"'Shun!" called Baxter as the high officer approached.

The admiral returned Baxter's salute.

"Carry on," he commanded, businesslike.

"Good morning, Baxter," he added with a quickly vanishing smile that might have been perfunctory or genuine. "You don't object if I go along, do you?"

"Quite delighted, sir," returned Baxter impersonally.

The admiral stepped down on the bridge, nodding to shipyard figures he recognized and who crowded closer together to make room for him.

"All right," Baxter directed the boat's captain for the second time. "Cast off!"

IN A few moments, the new E-boat with her Diesels thumping and chugging slipped down the harbor. As she passed the last harbor buoy a destroyer overtook her and passed on ahead to sea. The new craft was going some thirty miles out, and it was not safe for a British sub to be anywhere near that distance from shore unescorted, unless she were there on war business. Not so much from the fear of an enemy boat, but from the danger of mistaken zeal on the part of surface friends. A submarine was a submarine to any trawler, merchant gun crew or prowling destroyer. The sight of a conning tower or the ripple of a periscope meant shrieking shells, depth bombs, or sharp steel prows.

When abeam of the harbor lightship Baxter rang for full speed on the Diesels. The engines were to run at their top speed until the diving ground was reached. From the engineroom bulkhead to the bows where the shining torpedo tubes winked under the bright electric lights, officers and crew moved about testing, explaining and occasionally grumbling. The excess of passengers filled passageways and elbowroom. From a naval standpoint, the inside of the boat was dirty. That meant long, hard hours of cleaning and shining.

The boat had been tearing along for more than two hours with the destroyer pushing on a few cable lengths ahead. Abruptly the destroyer started signaling at high speed.

Baxter watched closely. The signalman's face was immobile and impenetrable as he followed the wigwagging across the water.

Abruptly, he turned to Baxter.

"He says there's a merchantman in trouble down the channel. He's got a rush call and can you dive and stay submerged for three hours or until he gets back?"

Baxter turned a questioning look toward Admiral Harker. The latter did not so much as raise his eyebrows.

"Tell him, 'yes'," directed Baxter briefly.

The signalman had scarcely started swishing his flags up and down again before the destroyer was shooting off down the channel to the aid of a distressed merchant ship.

Civilians cast sidelong glances at one another. The thing didn't look good. The sea lapping at the rounded wall of the submarine—it seemed an exceedingly small, frail thing now—and stretching off in each direction as far as they could see, lacked friendliness. There had been something reassuring about the destroyer, momentarily growing smaller as it dashed away from them. A stocky yard manager, red faced and talkative, forgot that he had just lighted his cigar and he tossed it into the rolling seas. None spoke.

"There is nothing in sight," said Baxter casually. "We'll knock along for a few minutes more, then try her out under water."

With a thumb he motioned toward the conning tower hatch.

"Perhaps you gentlemen would just as soon drop down now," he suggested.

Hands reached up to straighten hats. Faces cast instinctive glances toward the hazy skies above. The last civilian was just disappearing down the opening. Admiral Harker's eyes roved around the horizon as he stepped toward the hatch.

"You'll be diving at once, eh, Baxter?" the tall, gray haired man with the braid was saying when his even words changed to a quick, startled shout.

"Baxter! Torpedo!"

The trial captain had seen it at the same moment—a creaming white trail that streaked out across the E boat's nose. It had missed by inches.

"Down, sir!" shouted Baxter frantically. "Quick!" Roughly he shoved the high officer of his Majesty's navy down the hatch top.

The coxswain had been on subs before. He was already diving down with the gyrorepeater and other gear. Baxter was right on his shoulders. He pressed the klaxon button while he was slamming shut the hatch top.

"German sub! Torpedoes!" Admiral Harker shouted as he shot down the ladder.

His words and the look on his face told the officers and crew below that the blaring of the klaxon a second later was no practise stunt. The boat's commander flooded the internal tanks with a rush. Men shot the hydroplane wheels over and the boat canted bottomward.

A CRASH dive is exciting enough at any time. With a partly green crew in a boat that has never submerged before, plus a crowd of scared and much in the way civilians, there are no words adequate for the confusion arising.

With his eyes riveted on the depth gage, Baxter shouted commands.

Twelve feet. That meant a conning tower top still exposed. He awaited for the inevitable second torpedo, a blinding roar, a rush of water into the boat, the cries and shouts of strangling men—the end.

The gage needle traveled on—18—24—30—40—50—60. The E-boat was plunging to the bottom like a rock. She was new. There might be undetected weak spots ready to let a flow of water in on the batteries with a resultant blast and a cloud of death dealing chlorine.

"Hold her up!" shouted Baxter. "Up to forty, coxswain!"

The coxswain struggled with his wheel.

"Blow two and three," ordered Baxter.

A pump stamped and hammered as it drove a heavy load of water out of the auxiliary.

Shortly the coxswain called that she was on an even keel at forty feet, and answered up or down to her hydroplanes.

Baxter mopped a handkerchief across his forehead. He looked around with a foolish smile. Only then did the lines of stark fear leave some of the faces of the civilians hovering helplessly about.

Admiral Harker, during the diving operation, had stood silent and calm watching Baxter, the officers and men under him.

"Well executed, Baxter," he said evenly. "Good dive. I presume the German is headed for home and just happened on us."

"Quite likely, sir," responded Baxter. "Undoubtedly he saw these civilians on the bridge. He knew we were on trial and undoubtedly unarmed."

"What do you propose to do, Baxter?" questioned the admiral matter of factly. "Think the German will go on his way?"

"Well," hesitated Baxter, "he may not dive until the destroyer comes back or until something else happens along. I think we had just as well try our hull test, being that we have already started, abrupt though it has been."

"The best idea, I presume," spoke the admiral.

A few moments later, the E-boat was lying on the bottom while a half dozen caulkers passed fore and aft daubing red paint on rivets and seams where tiny trickles of water indicated red lead or packing not properly set for active service. They did not tarry over their task. Officers moved about among them, stopping to converse over this point and that. They tried to indicate that they had forgotten the excitement of a few minutes before and displayed great interest and concern over the job at hand.

At intervals while they lay on the bottom Baxter had picked up the hydrophone headgear and listened intently.

"Can't hear anything," he commented to Admiral Harker, standing close by. "I fancy he's gone on. Probably saw our destroyer leave us—likely saw him signaling. He'll not be around when the destroyer shows up. I think we'd best wait until it is time for the destroyer to show; then go up. We haven't anything but dummy torpedoes aboard for a couple of practise shots. We'd be in a bad way to run into him again."

IT WAS an uncomfortable two hours' wait for the shore folk in the boat. Nervousness was written over the face of every shipyard officer and worker in the boat, a fact which appeared to give the boat's crew, new men and old, a keen enjoyment. They nudged each other, spoke in undertones and cast glances at the civilians with their bowler hats and shore clothes which seemed strangely out of place down under the ocean in the narrow tunnel of steel.

Of the shore crowd, Admiral Harker alone seemed perfectly at home. He sauntered about looking at valves, gears and instruments. Occasionally he stopped to ask a question.

Out of the corner of his eyes Baxter watched the admiral rove about.

"I'd like to see that old bat really scared," he mused to himself.

One of the engine room artificers with a handful of waste nudged a companion.

"No funk about the old man, eh?" he whispered.

"'Es a game old cock," agreed the other, "but I'll wager 'e was not so calm inside when that bloomin' 'fish' shot by."

Just three hours from the time of diving, the E-boat started to the surface, climbing up cautiously. No sound had been heard in the hydrophone that a sailor had slapped over his ears as the craft climbed upward.

"Slow ahead, both motors," called Baxter as he slid into position at the periscope. "Hold her at eighteen, Coxswain."

A dead silence settled over the boat as she climbed toward the surface. Not a sound save the rattling of the steering chain, the musical hum of the motors, the steady click of the gyro and a subdued sizzling in the air lines.

"Eighteen feet," called the man at the gage.

"Hold her steady," commanded Baxter, and slowly raised the periscope.

"Sir," called the man at the hydrophones just as Baxter pushed the periscope through to daylight, "I hear propellers."

If Baxter heard, he paid no attention. He stiffened at the eyepiece.

"Full ahead—both motors!" he shouted.

A switch went home, and the giant batteries shot their full strength into the motors. Those in the boat felt her jump forward.

"Steady all!" cried Baxter.

The boat lurched heavily.

A deadened, rending crash sounded forward. The walls of the E-boat creaked and strained. Men who had not grabbed hold of supports piled up on the floor. Frightened exclamations rose from the throats of the civilians.

"She's sinking!" cried a man at the gage.

"Blow everything forward!" shouted Baxter to the boat's captain. "I rammed the German and he's carrying us down."

A rush of air sounded through the pipes and vents as it drove the water ballast out of the forward tanks.

Slowly the E-boat started toward the surface again.

"Stop blowing!" shouted Baxter.

The command was carried out in a flash, but the boat continued to rise, now faster than before.

"The German's blowing his to save himself!" cried Baxter.

"Follow me up the hatch, some of you with guns."

Baxter dashed upward to struggle with the hatch top.

Seconds later, a flood of daylight poured into the boat.

Gun in hand, Baxter clambered out of the hatch top. A sub-lieutenant and two petty officers with drawn automatics followed closely. Admiral Harker pushed up last.

The nose of the E-boat was driven far into the walls of the German. The enemy craft had no chance to live. Only the lifting power of the English boat held her from sinking to the bottom instantly like a length of hollow steel.

From her hatch top poured her luckless crew, one on top of the other. Some managed to jump across from the broken sides of their own boat to the narrow forward deck of the E-boat. Others simply plunged into the sea and swam for the Englishman.

"*Kamerad! Kamerad!*"

The cry rose from the frightened lips of sailors who had been taught that no mercy waited them at the hands of their enemy.

The civilians and others below in the E-boat heard the cries of commotion above, but no shots.

"Tell half of your men to line up aft; the other half forward," they heard Baxter commanding.

From a new voice close above the hatch top they caught a flow of German words as the U-boat's commander passed on the instructions to his crew.

FIVE minutes later the E-boat with a motley array of German underwater sailors strung out along her topside, backed away and the U-boat settled down into the sea on her last dive. From the depths came a great boiling and a cloud of steamlike substance marking the explosion of the stricken boat's batteries. Oil filmed over the surface.

The E-boat had barely pulled away from the scene of the ramming when down the channel came her convoy destroyer. Recognition signals flashed back and forth as she swerved in close. From her decks arose a cheer as the astounded crew caught sight of the German prisoners lined up on her deck under the guard of carbines and pistols in the hands of the E-boat's crew.

A light breeze had sprung up and the sun, reaching through the vanishing haze, set all the sea flashing and sparkling. Where the waves lapped at the sides of the E-boat and left them wet, the sun danced brightly. Baxter stood at one side of the little conning tower bridge, his eyes roving over the prisoners scattered about on deck, silent and thankful, then out across the sea where lay the enemy's coast.

Admiral Harker moved across the bridge where he, too, had stood silent for a long period.

"Baxter," he began in a tone of one expounding an opinion after deep, protracted thought, "let me compliment you on your judgment. Quite likely he would have torpedoed us. It would have been a shame to lose a new boat like this one."

Baxter was not to be outdone by the admiral's studied calmness, his casually conversational tone.

"The boat was in good position for ramming," he replied slowly. "It was really all one could do. These new ones have good stout noses on them, too," he added.

"Quite true," returned the admiral. "By the way, Baxter, how would you like to take a flotilla up into the Baltic to attack enemy ships? His transports and fighting craft have had it their own way there. We'd like to stir things up a bit."

The suave look, the forced impersonal air of Baxter's face was gone. It lighted up in boyish eagerness. His eyes sparkled excitedly. His mouth started to open.

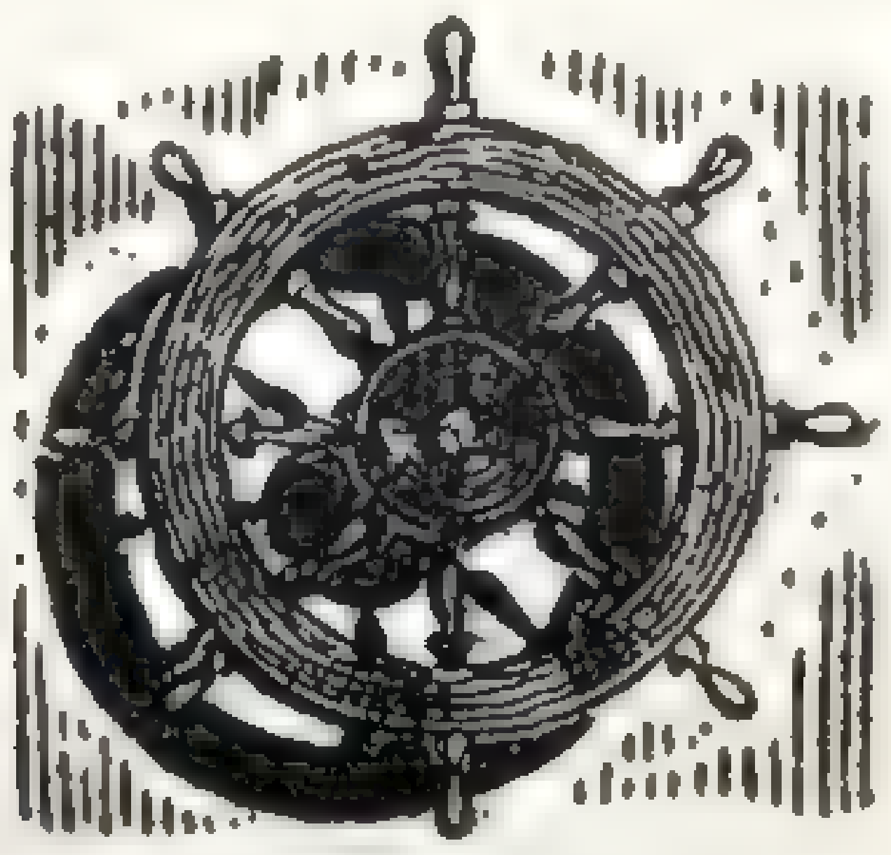
There was a merry twinkle in the cold, appraising blue eyes of Admiral Harker as he regarded the younger officer.

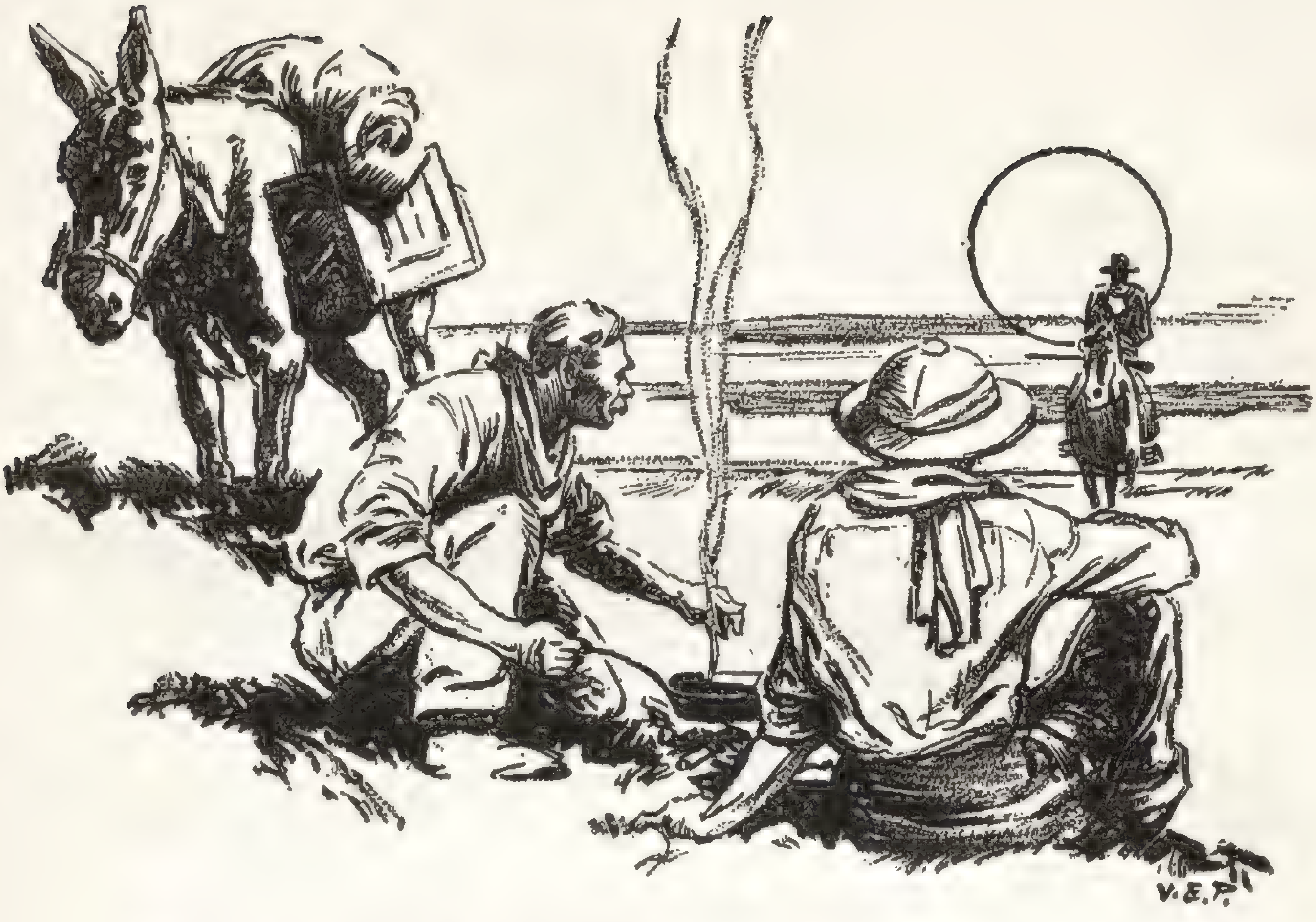
"You can pick your own crew for your boat," continued the admiral. "And—er—" he was actually smiling now—"you'll be on your own. There'll be no signaling to Admiralty before attacking."

"Sir," stammered Baxter, "sir, I can't tell—"

The admiral interrupted him.

"And, by the way, Baxter, come up to my office tomorrow. I want to go over this thing with you, and I have a little decoration for you in recognition of a bit of work you did off Helgoland."





THE SUNDOWNER

When a mysterious killer stalked the South African veld

By L. PATRICK GREENE

THERE was much rejoicing at the veld encircled camp of Pete Robins and "Next Time" Sawley. After many years spent in a fruitless search for gold they had at last struck a lucky patch. Nothing to set the world on fire; nothing really worthy of mention in the world's newspapers; but enough to enable these two old timers to end the evening of their days in idleness and comparative luxury.

"I'll get me a new set of teeth," chortled Pete, "an' by gum, I'll have 'em crowned with gold. An' you, you blamed old heathen, I suppose you'll set up one of these harems!"

Both men laughed. Despite Sawley's optimistic nickname, he was a confirmed skeptic where women were concerned.

The sun was sinking fast and the pack mules of the two age grizzled prospectors, sensing the coming of darkness and its attendant perils, no longer grazed but stood contentedly behind their masters, staring ruminatively at the blazing camp-fire.

"I'm thinking," said Next Time, putting another log on the fire, "that we ought to be a-gettin' skoff ready. No sense in trekking tonight. An' we'll sleep late in the morning for a change. I tell you, Pete, that's one thing I'm allus goin' to do in future. I ain't never goin' to get up early. No. Once I get out of Rhodesia, I'm goin' to lay in bed mornings."

"An' I suppose you're still set on livin' at Durban? You old fool."

"An' we're goin' to," Sawley replied confidently. "We tossed up for it when we first started prospecting together. An' I won. Y' can't get out of it now. It's allus been settled that we live down in Durban once we made our pile."

"Damn' foolish, just the same," Pete grumbled. "Just because you called the turn of a penny thirty odd years ago I've got to go an' live in Durban now."

There was silence for a little while as the two partners prepared the evening meal: Sawley making *veld-briks* and measuring out the coffee with a careful hand; Pete Robins skinning a small buck, shot earlier in the day, and roasting a joint on a cleverly improvised spit.

When all was nearly ready and the air filled with the appetizing aroma of the cooking food—fragrance of coffee mingling with the spicy, nose pleasing scent of wood smoke and roasting flesh—the two men sat down again, side by side, their plates and tin cups before them, waiting for the coffee to boil, the dough cakes to bake and the buck to be cooked to that nice degree which destroyed its toughness but preserved its sweet juicy flavor.

At a common thought, they both sighed.

"We'll miss all this, Pete," said Sawley.

Pete nodded agreement and inhaled deeply as if he would take with him everything that the veld meant to him. Then, philosophically, he said:

"An' there'll be the things we won't miss: Such as both being out on the veld, alone, down with fever; an' runnin' out of grub; an' goin' without water—an' gettin' too much water like we did that time we was caught by the rains a week's trek from the nearest *dorp* an' no shelter tent. Yep! I don't know as I'll be pining overmuch.

"Well—skoff's most ready. How about a snorter afore we eat?"

"No," Sawley replied. "I don't know as I will."

"Then if you won't, I won't. No sense in drinking alone." Then, slapping his companion on the back, Pete continued, breaking the custom of nearly thirty years—the two drank only when they visited the *dorps*, the cottages—"But hell, yes, I'm goin' to have a drink. An' so are you. Ain't we allus carried a bottle with us so's we could drink a toast to celebrate? Only we never had nothin' to celebrate; not till now. We're goin' to have a drink."

As he spoke he reached for his pack saddle and extracting from it a bottle of "Cape Smoke" poured out a drink for himself and Sawley.

He hesitated a moment and from a canvas sack emptied out on the ground the nuggets they had found.

"To them, old timer," he said, raising his cup. "But mostly to you—the best partner a man ever had."

"Here's to you and to them, an' to the end of our work," Sawley responded.

They clinked their cups, nodded understanding of each other and drank the toast.

"We'll drink champagne in Durban," said Sawley, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

The coffee boiling over, they were brought with a rush to present needs, salvaging the coffee pot, cursing because they had permitted the *veld-briks* to burn and the buck to dry up.

For awhile they ate in silence, each busily occupied with his thoughts, living again in memory the adventures they had lived through together.

A HOLLOW booming noise—loud to their veld trained ears—brought them both to their feet and, turning slightly, with handshaded eyes, they gazed toward the west. There they saw, silhouetted against the sun's blood red afterglow, a horseman riding fast, spurring his horse. Occasionally he shouted in a fear strangled voice.

"A blooming sundowner," Pete remarked contemptuously, "comin' to cadge a drink an' a meal. He thinks we won't turn him away. But he's goin' to get a surprise. I'm—"

"He's lost—that's what he is," Sawley rejoined. "An' you can't fool me talking that way. As if you ever really wanted to say no to a sundowner. Why, you poor fool, I've known you share the last bit of grub we had with a chap who just happened to be passing! An', you old skinflint, we got plenty to share now. He can have our whole bloomin' outfit. It's no good to us any more. I'll be glad to get shut of it."

"Me too," Pete assented. "But—" he hesitated—"I'm a-goin' to keep my pick an' hammer."

The horseman was very near now; the two old prospectors could distinguish details of his dress and the horse's sweat blackened coat.

"An' still he don't see us, poor devil," Sawley said. "He's lost right enough. Let's give him a shout, Pete, or he'll ride past us."

Their first shrill, falsetto cry apparently was unheard. But at their second the horseman reined in his horse and, standing up in his stirrups, gazed hopefully about him. Then, seeing the camp of the two old timers, he grinned sheepishly and rode up to them.

Ten minutes later, having unsaddled, turned his horse loose to graze, he was sitting beside the camp-fire, opposite the two partners, eating greedily.

They both scrutinized him closely, wondering why so young a man should sport a heavy beard; wondering why he kept his wide brimmed hat pulled down so low over his eyes as to entirely mask the upper half of his face.

"I'd like to know," Sawley asked abruptly, "not that it matters a damn—you're welcome to all we've got—was you really lost, stranger?"

The other ceased eating for a moment and looked across the smoking fire toward his questioners. He laughed noisily.

"Course I wasn't," he said with an assumption of honest confession. "I saw your fire smoke a couple of hours ago an' headed this way hopin' for a hand out and the use of a blanket for the night. An' because I've been turned away empty handed before now—some folks have no sympathy for honest sundowners like me—I made play I was lost. Knew you couldn't refuse me then."

"We wouldn't have anyway," Pete said simply. "We're allus ready to share anything we've got with anybody worse off than ourselves. Specially now, eh, Next Time? Specially now."

"You've said it, Pete," Sawley agreed with a happy chuckle.

"Why specially now?" the sundowner asked casually.

Sawley indicated the nuggets which still lay on the ground in the fire light.

"Because of them," he said. "We've struck it rich, we have. An' we're goin' to quit prospecting; we're goin' to live like lords at Durban. Know anything about gold?"

"Ought to. I'm a graduate of the School of Mines."

"That means you know nothin'," Pete snorted contemptuously. "But even you ought to know what that's worth!" And he tossed over one of the largest nuggets to the sundowner.

THE man turned it over and examined it with an outward show of indifference, but his hands shook so that the nugget almost dropped from his hold.

"Must be fever coming on," he mumbled to explain his tremor of excitement, and continued casually, "Yes! Looks as if you've struck it rich. What is it—an outcrop or—"

"Naw! Nothing like that," Sawley interrupted derisively. "An's that all yer School of Mines taught yer? That, an' these here—" he indicated the other nuggets with a jerk of his thumb—"is pudding stone. There ain't any more where they was."

The sundowner laughed harshly, mirthlessly.

"Of course," he said. "I should have known that. At any rate, it looks as if living ought to be easy for you from now on."

"We've earned it," Pete agreed complacently.

"But aren't you taking a risk?" the sundowner continued. "You're being damned careless with your nuggets. Why—"

Both the old prospectors laughed.

"You must be a new chum," Sawley chortled. This here is a law abiding country. Ain't such things as hold-ups an' robberies or anything like that. For all that Rhodesia's only but yesterday, as yer might say, won from savages it's a damned sight more civilized than a lot of countries what boast of being a young heaven on earth. Property's sacred in this man's country. We got police—but they're only to keep the niggers in order an' to form pretty escorts fer any big wig wot takes it into his head to pay us a visit. They don't have to look after us whites. No, indeed."

"Why," Pete chimed in, "if we was to leave them nuggets where they be, with a piece of writing saying as they belonged to Pete Robins an' Next Time Sawley, we could go away an' leave 'em fer a year, or more, an' bank on finding 'em when we came back. An'," he concluded with a chuckle, "I wouldn't be at all surprised to find somebody'd dropped an extra nugget or two along side of 'em. Sort of paying us interest."

They all laughed at that, but the sundowner's laugh was forced and his voice indicated emotional strain as he asked—

"And when did you discover them?"

"Two or three hours ago," Sawley replied. "An' just by bull luck. We wasn't thinking of prospecting. Just climbed down the bank of the river to get water an' the bank gave way—it was sort of undermined—with us. An' there was the pocket. We decided there an' then there was all the gold we wanted an' decided to start back for the *dorp* in the morning."

"I suppose you paid your niggers off right away? At least I don't see any around."

"Niggers! What do you think we are? A bloomin' syndicate? We're prospectors. We find fer ourselves. An' now—" Sawley glanced up at the star sprinkled sky. With the setting of the sun darkness had rapidly fallen upon the *veld*—"me an' Pete are goin' to turn in. Goin' to make an early start in the morning. Help yourself to anything you fancy. I'll leave you the bottle an' you'll find a spare blanket over there in that pack. Tomorrow you can have our whole bloomin' outfit save the little stuff we'll need to get us to the *dorp*."

"Good night!"

"S'long," said Pete, gathering up the nuggets and putting them back in the canvas bag.

Ten minutes later the two prospectors, wrapped snugly in their blankets, were sleeping the sleep of the conscience free, snoring noisily.

For a long time the sundowner sat beside the fire, hardly moving. Occasionally he looked in the direction of the sleeping partners, but chiefly he stared fixedly before him at the flickering fire flames. His attitude was that of a man who was trying to persuade himself as to the proper course of action to follow.

At last he nodded, tensed visibly. He had arrived at a conclusion; had answered to his own satisfaction all the objections which his inner conscience had waged against his first greed inspired plan.

"Yes," he muttered. "It's the best way. Nobody to tell tales then. An' it's safe."

Drawing his revolver, he rose to his feet and moved stealthily to the side of the two sleepers.

He started guiltily as Pete murmured in his sleep—

"I don't want to go to Durban and we'll be miserable as hell away from the old life."

Then two shots profaned the silence of the night.

Ten minutes later the sundowner was galloping swiftly away from the place, his saddle wallets bulging with nuggets.

On the *veld* behind him the two old prospectors no longer snored. Pete stirred fitfully, scrawled something on the empty canvas bag beside, using his finger for a pen; the warm sticky fluid which saturated his shirt for ink.

But the message was never finished. He had barely finished the second word when his strength completely left him. His hand fell limply to his side, his head lolled back.

"At any rate," he said with a feeble chuckle, "this'll do old Next Time one in the eye. No Durban fer us. We're goin' to do some prespecting in another field. Next Time'll be—"

His eyes closed and he was very still.

The fire died down.

The two mules whickered uneasily; snorted in terror at the hideous cackling laugh of a hyena.

The two partners were silent, motionless.

Other hyenas answered the call of the first. The bush resounded with their ghoulish tittering. Eyes gleamed from the darkness of the bush beyond the circle of fire light.

The mules stampeded; galloped, panic stricken, away from the place. For a little while the thunder of their hoofs on the iron hard ground silenced all other sound.

They died away in the distance and the encircling hyenas drew in yet closer, cackling derisively.

SERGEANT JOHNSON *of the Gwelo* detachment of the Rhodesian mounted police twisted the waxed ends of his super-military mustache and looked doubtfully at the trooper who lounged carelessly before him.

"What's the blinkin' corps coming to?" he muttered. "What does headquarters mean by sending this long legged, red headed, sleepy eyed looking fool down here for special duty. Bet he wouldn't move if I jabbed him with a pin."

"I reckon you'd lose yore bet," the trooper drawled easily. "I ain't noways partial to bein' used as a pin cushion."

The sergeant started, was visibly flustered that his voiced thoughts should have been overheard. With an impatient gesture he again turned to the documents the trooper had handed him, frowning in an effort of concentration as he read them.

But his curiosity was too strong for a successful continuation of his pose and, letting the papers fall from his hand on the desk before which he sat, he stared in frank astonishment at the trooper, endeavoring to recall the vague reports he had heard of the man's abilities, wondering how such a slothful looking individual could possibly have earned his nickname and reputation. "Dynamite" fitted them both.

Gradually the sergeant's attitude changed. A keen student of mankind, he was not to be deceived by exteriors. The man's buttons were outrageous from a regimental standpoint; his khaki puttees, loosely rolled, threatened at any moment to drop about his ankles; his helmet was travel stained and worn at a rakish angle; his movements were slow; his whole attitude expressed a desire for peace, a willingness to let everything slide, if only he would not be disturbed. He was tall, loosely jointed; his legs were slightly bowed.

Judging from all that, "Slow Match" would have seemed an apter nickname; and such a man the sergeant would have dealt with very harshly—orders from headquarters or no orders.

Instead, he said gruffly—

"*Sit down, Drury, and let's get down* to business."

"Thanks. It's sure tiring standin' to attention. An' it's hotter'n hell."

He eased himself into a chair, draped one leg over the other, nonchalantly rolled a cigaret, lighted it and smoked with a sigh of satisfaction.

"I've spent a lifetime an' wasted a hell of a lot of tobacco trying to roll a cigaret like that," the sergeant observed. "You're a Yank, aren't you? That explains a lot."

"Such as?"

"Oh—your slack appearance an' not being exactly—er—amenable to discipline, an'—"

"You got it wrong if you think my bein' a Yank explains all that. It don't. I'm me—*that* explains it. I was made this way, an' that, plus the fact I was doin' a man's job on the ranch back home in Texas afore I was britched—as you might say—don't make it easy fer me to play at soldiers, an' say 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir,' an' stand to attention, an' burnish my buttons. Gord!"

He groaned in mock dismay at a sudden recollection of the length to which one of his friends—the smartest man in a smart corps—went in his obsession for cleanliness. "Why, old Stevens—he polishes the hobnails in the soles of his boots!"

"But that's all no never mind. Let's get down to brass tacks.

"First of all, where's the officer in command of the Troop? I was told to see him."

"He's in hospital—went this morning—an' ain't receiving visitors. Got a nervous breakdown."

"Too bad. An' the loot? *Left*tenant, you know," he added in response to the sergeant's look of mystification.

"Oh, him? He's away on a border patrol. Won't be back for two weeks or more. So, Drury, you'll have to deal with me."

The trooper nodded.

"Just as soon—sooner. Don't have to be so blamed careful about my P's an' Q's. Well, what's the trouble?"

"Know anything?"

"Some. But you go on as if I don't know anything."

The sergeant nodded.

"WELL," he began, "this used to be as quiet a district as a man 'd want to see. Too blamed quiet, if you ask me, an', believe me or believe me not, most of the crimes were committed by police! You know. They'd get fed up havin' nothin' to do an' go down to the *dorp*, do a little elbow raising an' bending at the bars, an' then, fooling themselves they was drunk, 'd break a few windows an' run 'emselves in! That's a fact! Outside of that we had no crimes—except a few niggers who went out without passes, or hadn't registered their dogs, or something like that.

"Take it from me—we were a damned law abiding community. An' that's surprising when you think that this is a gold mining district, and that there's a number of small workings—one man outfits, you know—miles away from anywhere. Yes. An' some of the mines used to send their pay dirt in to the *dorp*, packed in an old biscuit tin. A lone unguarded nigger used to bring it in an' no one ever thought it a risky proceeding. But—" the sergeant sighed—"that was nearly four months ago. Since then, things have changed.

"It began with the disappearance of a nigger taking in the pay dirt from the Star Mine—a one stamp mine—at the northern end of the district.

"We didn't think so much-a-much about it at the time," continued the sergeant. "Everybody said it was too damned bad, and tough luck on the mine folk. But that was all. Sort of jumped to the conclusion that the nigger had deserted and, as he wasn't properly signed on by the mine folk, we hadn't any proper description of him.

"Well then, about two weeks after that, old Jimmy Short—a queer old customer who lived like a white kaffir half of the year and like a bloomin' hermit monk the other half—he was found dead in his hut. Been dead two or three days according to the account of the men who found him. Still nothing was suspected. Jimmy might have died of fever or old age—he was getting on for seventy. An' even when his property was searched an' there was no trace of the money everybody said he had hoarded up, still nobody thought anything.

"An', knowing what we afterwards came to know there were several other cases that ought to have roused our suspicion. But didn't. You know there's nothing to tell how a man died after he's been lying out on the open veld two or three days. God, no! It's a wonder we find anything left of 'em at all—what with the sun, an' the vultures, an' hyenas an' all that."

The sergeant paused a moment and

looked quizzically at Drury; wondering what thoughts the trooper's poker face hid.

"I'm telling you all this," he continued defensively, "to explain why we were slow—or seemed to be slow—getting on the job."

"You don't have to alibi yourself to me," Drury drawled. "I ain't yore superior officer. What you did or didn't do, don't matter a hell to me. Go on with the yarn—it sounds real thrilling."

The sergeant snorted loudly.

"It's thrilling, all right," he said sourly. "As I was about to say we got really suspicious when young Frank Hastings was found dead not a hundred yards from the police camp. He was a wild lad, a remittance man; and we knew for a fact that he'd received a big check that day. The captain cashed it for him. As a matter of fact the captain was the last man to see him alive."

"Save the murderer, of course."

"Of course," the sergeant assented hastily with a shrewd look at Drury. "Well, anyway, we found young Hastings with a bullet through his head and not a penny in his pocket."

"And not a clue to be seen?" Drury questioned.

"Clues, hell!" the sergeant stormed. "What do you think you are? Playing you're *Sherlock Holmes?* Clues! Not a smell of one. It was raining like hell at the time. Why, the way it rained would have washed out a bloomin' elephant's fingerprint in two ticks. Clues! God, no."

"Suppose you know what time it was?"

"Just about. He cashed his check at the captain's quarters just before sundown. Not that there was much sun visible! One of the troopers found his body an hour later. An' that's all we ever knew about that affair. Course, we kept saying we was working on the case and hoped soon to affect an arrest, but that was all eyewash. And, believe me, we was glad when we heard of another case, way down in southeast of the district. A settler this time. He was on his way back to his homestead with money he'd got selling some oxen. He was one of them cautious old birds that don't believe in banks; thinks they're out to rob him. He kept his money locked in a tin cash box which he used to put under his pillow at night.

"He never made a secret of it either, the old fool! But then, who ever suspected anything like this 'ud happen. Why, nobody'd ever think of locking their doors an' goin' armed. Now everybody does an' goes about armed to the teeth, suspecting everybody they meet.

"Well, anyway, the old settler was found dead in his bed. A bullet—fired at close quarters, judging by the way the bedclothes was scorched—had cut through his heart. An' on the ground beside the bed was the empty cash box.

"And, believe me, from that time to this we've been on the jump but couldn't get anything to go on. We suspected a hell of a lot of chaps, but they was always able to prove an alibi. We went nearly off our heads. No wonder the C.O. had a nervous breakdown, with a sort of Jack the Ripper running wild.

"I don't intend to give you a report on all the cases. You'll find them in that file over there. Read 'em for yourself. I'll just mention the latest. He killed old Pete Robins and Next Time Sawley—two of the best old timers you ever met in your life. They were prospectors and we hadn't heard anything of 'em for over six months. They'd been off on a prospecting trip and we weren't troubling about them. They were happy-go-lucky old sorts, enjoyed life even if they never struck anything beyond what 'd do to outfit another trip.

"Everybody liked them; they'd share their last crust with any chance met sundowner who fell in with them.

"Yet there they was. Trooper Jenkins found 'em out on the *veld* two or three days trek away. Not much of 'em left; not enough to tell how they died. Poor old chaps."

"THEN you can't say for certain," Drury interposed, "that they was murdered. Judging by what you said about the others, there was always a motive for the other crimes. Gold. But that don't seem the case here. Maybe they just up and died of old age."

The sergeant shook his head.

"Maybe," he said slowly. "But you can't tell anybody in this *dorp* that. They've got this 'killer' business on the brain, an' they're all as edgy as hell. It ain't possible for a man to die of natural causes now!" He laughed ruefully. "Why, even when Evan Evans died of D.T.'s there was some who said it was real snakes he'd been seeing an' this unknown Jack the Ripper was responsible for it all!"

Drury rolled another cigaret.

"It sure sounds like a hell of a mess," he commented presently. "But ain't you missed telling me something? Ain't you got a young feller under arrest that's accused of all these here crimes?"

"Yes," the troop sergeant said slowly. "I was hoping you wouldn't hear of that. I was hoping you'd go to work on the case as if it hadn't been solved. You see, this youngster I've got is the brother of the girl I want to marry. An' damn it, I don't believe he's guilty for all that he won't stir a finger to prove he's innocent an' the circumstantial evidence is strong against him. He's her brother, an' he *couldn't* do things like that."

Drury nodded sympathetically.

"Sure hope you can prove what you believe. But what's the evidence against him?"

"Well, he's a wild youngster in some ways: Drinks an' gambles more than he ought to, 'specially as he can't hold his liquor like a man should; an' he don't hold the right kind of cards to justify the way he bets. Well, beginning about six months ago, he's been goin' off on short prospecting trips—as he calls them. An' when he comes back he's flush with money—money to burn in fact. But he can't say where he got it an' his trips have coincided with a murder."

"That ain't enough proof to hang a man."

"Damn it, I know it. An' I wouldn't have arrested him only for his own safety. There was some talk amongst the boys down the *dorp* of lynching him—so I arrested him in order to save him from a rope party."

"But he'll have to stand trial," Drury commented.

"Damn it, I know that. An' he'll be found guilty—bound to; public opinion being the way it is. An' there's another thing that counts against the lad—we've had no trouble since he's been locked up."

Drury frowned.

"That don't point anything one way or the other. You've only had him under lock and key for two or three days, an' by all accounts, sometimes over a week went by between things.

"But never mind about that now. You go and get young Bailey—that's his name, ain't it?—an' his sister. I want to have a talk with 'em both. An' I'd rather have 'em come to me. Don't want to be seen round the *dorp*. Reckon nobody's seen me yet, except you. Leastways I reckon no one seen me enough to recognize me again.

"So on yore way—an' while you've gone I'll have a squint through these records and have a look see at exhibit A and B an' Gord knows what trash yore troopers have collected."

The sergeant nooded. Somehow the ungainly trooper, with his shock of flaming red hair, had infused confidence.

"I'll have 'em here in an hour," he said briskly. "S'long."

"S'long," Drury replied absentmindedly.

He was already studying the stilted report of the trooper who investigated the first case to rouse the suspicions of the police.

He found little there to go on. Just the plain unvarnished statement of the discovery of a murdered man, the location of the death wound, the disappearance of money and—

"I have the honor to be,
Sir,
Your obedient servant..."

At the end of half an hour he had come

to the end of the reports and had added nothing to his knowledge save that the time of most of the crimes approximated sundown.

"An' if that means anything," Drury grumbled, "damned if I know what. My Gord, what a blind lot these troopers are. Looks as if they seen a dead body an' then fainted. Leastways they don't seem anything else. Not judging by their reports, that is.

"An', somehow, I don't hanker to talk to them. Only get my thought trails clogged up with a lot of half-baked theories; an' they'll tell me things, if I question them, that ain't so simply because they'll think they ought to have been so. I know. That's human nature. Just the same, I'd sure like to know what gun this chap used. As it is, for all the information these reports give, it might have been a revolver, a rifle or even a blamed Maxim."

Grumblingly he rose to his feet and walked over to a long, wooden bench on which were arranged, properly labeled, some part of the equipment of the murdered men. Drury's keen eye examined them one by one. They told him nothing; he had not expected to find anything. And then he picked up the canvas bag which had belonged to Pete Robins. He was almost on the point of discarding it when his eyes were held by scrawling characters, crudely printed on the bag.

Impatient at his own credulity he slowly traced out a word. The second ended in a struggling line; as if the writer's pen had fallen from nerveless fingers.

SUNDOWNER
SHOT

"An' that," commented Drury, "may mean a lot—but what? Anyways, it gives me a jumping off place. Natural game fer a man to play, come to think of it.

"Comes to a camp or mine at sunset, looks for a meal an' a grubstake an' gets it. Nobody takes no notice of him—who's goin' to suspect a roving sundowner?—bides his time, does his shooting an' gets away with the stuff.

"But, what's he want to kill a couple of old timers for? They hadn't anything worth taking. Maybe, though, they suspected him of the other things an' he wanted them out of the way so they couldn't tell things. That 'd be motive enough. Hell! It sure is a mess, no matter how you look at it. Wish I could have a talk with the captain. He might be able to tell me things that ain't mentioned in the reports here. From what they told me at headquarters, he's made himself sick tryin' to get clues on the business. An' he must have got something!"

Absentmindedly Drury turned the canvas bag inside out. A small piece of rock fell on to the table with a rattle.

He picked it up and examined it, at first casually; then with keen interest. He scraped it with his finger nail.

"An' that settles that," he said conclusively. "There's yore motive. I'm gambling that piece of rock was broken off of a nugget. Maybe the old boys had struck it rich.

"Lemme see! They was killed a week ago. Right! Then I'm goin' to start from where they was found. That is, if anybody remembers where it was."

He turned to the report of the trooper who had discovered the bodies of the two old prospectors and found attached, a crude sketch map complete with X's to mark the positions of the bodies.

He was still studying this, committing it to memory, when a shrill whistle, followed by the sharp reports of rifle shots and the menacing voices of a mob shattered the silence.

DRURY dropped the map and rushed to the door of the hut and saw two figures—a man's and a girl's—racing over the camp square toward him while between them and a crowd of yelling miners was the sergeant with two troopers backing slowly and keeping the mob from rushing.

Drury's revolver suddenly appeared in his hand, seemed to have leaped from its holster, and he went forward, ready to take a hand in the game. As the girl and man rushed past him he saw that the latter was handcuffed.

The sergeant was yelling:

"Use sense, you fools! He'll be tried an' if he's guilty, he'll hang. What more do you want? Smithers, Townley, Briton—"

He was appealing to the more conservative members of the mob.

But still the men came on.

Because they were a mob, unschooled, lacking a definite plan, and because a respect for law and order still held them, none fired at the sergeant and his two men; none thought of encircling the policemen and taking them in the rear.

Those three men—four now that Drury had joined them—represented justice: They, actually, now stood between the mob and the man the mob wanted to lynch. And the mob had not yet worked itself up to the point where they would dare to throw all conventions to the wind.

But that time was almost at hand. Their forward pace was increasing; the occasional shots fired by the police no longer halted their pace. They came on faster.

One man hit by a ricocheting bullet fell with a scream.

For a moment the mob halted.

"Run!" Drury yelled to the sergeant and the two troopers. "Get back to the hut! They're going to rush us!"

A moment the sergeant hesitated, believing the mob was halted; then, seeing Drury was right, he turned with his troopers and the four men sprinted for the hut just as the mob, egged on by the men in the rear, came on again in a devastating rush.

The four policemen reached the hut, entered and the sergeant was about to slam the door, bolt it and pile chairs and desks against it to strengthen it from assault.

But before he could carry out his intentions Drury said curtly:

"No use doing that. They'd set fire to the hut. I'm goin' out to talk to 'em. Better take the irons off the kid."

Taking a rope—a rawhide rope; his third arm, as some one once called it—from his saddle he went outside again. And though his speech and actions had been rapid, as he now appeared to the onrushing miners, he personified laziness.

Leaning against the door jamb, a cigaret dangling from the corner of his mouth, his helmet tipped over one eye, he shook out his rope and spun it adeptly.

His calm assurance nonplused the men. They had expected to be greeted by shots as they neared the hut. Instead, there was the lazy stranger, playing tricks with a skipping rope; they had expected a fight, were ready for a fight, for their blood ran hot, had been whipped to fever heat by ill considered brooding on the crimes which had disturbed the peace of the community. But how could they fight when the only man opposed to them grinned at them in a disarming way and continued to make his rope snake about him in circles?

Their pace slackened to a jog-trot, to a walk—finally to a halt. They stared wonderingly at Drury who advanced a few paces toward them, swinging his rope in still wider circles. Now it weaved high above his head, now about his feet; shot out in front of him and then, as it receded, he jumped through it.

Suddenly he let it fall to the ground and, standing with feet apart, his hands on his hips, said apologetically:

"Shucks! That ain't nothing. There was a feller I knew named Tiny Flowers who could most make a rope talk. He—"

A raucous voice interrupted him:

"We don't want to hear what you've got to say. We want young Bailey and a rope."

"Aye. That's it."

"Enough of this fool play. Us 'ns 'ave come to see justice done."

The voice of the mob became a threatening murmur.

Drury jerked his head back toward the hut.

"The youngster's in there—an' his sister's with him. Don't forget that. An' here's a rope—"

He threw his rope toward them. "What are you goin' to do with it?"

"Hang Bailey higher than a kite."

"That's, damn, foolish," Drury said tersely. "He's got to be tried afore he's hanged. He—"

"We'll try him afterwards," one of the miners shouted grimly. "We know he's guilty."

"He's goin' to be tried all proper according to law," Drury continued evenly.

"Who says so?" a man shouted.

He was in the front rank of the men; a tall, sallow individual, wearing a high crowned straw hat.

"I say so for one," Drury replied, "an' there's twelve stout fellers to back me up."

"He's bluffing. Don't listen to him any longer. We know for a fact there's only Sergeant Johnson and two troopers, besides this one, at the camp!"

"Ah!" Drury exclaimed. "I'd forgotten them. I hadn't counted them in with my twelve. That makes it all the better. An' say, if you've any doubt about them twelve I'll introduce one to you by way of breaking the ice."

As he spoke he drew his revolver—materialized from the air it seemed, so swift were his movements—from a shoulder holster and a report punctuated his sentence. The bullet passed through the crown of the sallow miner's straw hat, whipping it from his head as if jerked by an invisible string.

"That's one of my twelve," Drury said, shouting to make his voice heard above the laughter which greeted the sallow man's ludicrous expression of amazement as he clapped his hands to his bald, shining pate. "I've got five more in here—" Drury indicated the revolver he held in his right hand—"an' six in this."

He drew his other revolver.

"An' I've been told, I shoot just a little better with my left than my right. All right. If you think you're so keen on what you call justice that eleven of you are willing to get a bullet in yore gizzard, come on an' take the kid. I'm warning you that I shoot fast an' straight. An' having said my say I wait for yore response."

For just a fraction of a minute the issue still remained in doubt. The slightest incident would serve to turn the scales one way or the other.

Presently it came.

As the sallow man stooped to retrieve his hat a strong gust of wind moved it slightly from his reach. He stooped again. Again it eluded him. He dashed after it.

It was enough. The tension was broken by gales of laughter. The miners looked at each other as if wondering why they had congregated together. Their expressions were sheepish. Somebody shouted that he was thirsty and that was a signal for a general departure.

Five minutes later not a miner was in sight and Drury, having re-entered the hut, was having a conference with the suspected "killer," his sister and the sergeant. The two troopers had departed, having been delegated by the sergeant to the routine tasks of the camp.

DRURY, with his keen intuition and knowledge of men almost immediately arrived at the conclusion that young Bailey was innocent of all the crimes attributed to him. Weak he certainly was, but obviously he lacked the nerve that the man who had systematically raided the country must have. His late narrow escape from a lynching party had left him white faced and trembling like an aspen leaf; in his eyes was a haunting look of terror and he cowered at his sister's side, his fingers nervously clutching her dress.

The girl had all her brother's good looks and, in addition, poise and strength of character. Her attitude toward her brother was almost maternal, despite the fact that he was several years her senior.

She patted his hand reassuringly and brushed back from his forehead the lock of black hair which clung limply to it.

Then she looked appealingly at the sergeant and from him to Drury. The three of them had now fixed their attention on Drury, who was nonchalantly rolling a cigaret.

"See here, youngster," he said suddenly, pointing an accusing finger at Bailey. "Don't you reckon you've played the fool long enough? You ain't got the guts to rob a man, an' too much imagination to murder one. Ain't it the truth? Why, you durned fool, you reckon you feel the rope round yore neck now, don't you?"

Bailey nodded, licking his dry lips nervously.

"God, yes," he muttered.

"All right then. Just think that a rope's a rope no matter who uses it—a crowd of lynchers or the hangman; the end's the same. Get that? Right. Now tell us where you got the money you've been throwing about, an' why you've kept dark about it. Nope! You needn't answer that. I know. Answer the first part. Where'd you get yore money?"

"It wasn't money," Bailey said sullenly.

Drury looked questioningly at the sergeant.

"It was nuggets," that man explained.

Drury nodded thoughtfully.

"Well, then," he demanded. "Where did you get the nuggets?"

"I found some pudding stone—conglomerate. It had a lot of nuggets in—big an' small. I *cached* them in the bush an' then went out an' got one whenever I was short of money."

"Which was blamed often if what I heard's true," Drury commented grimly. "All right, Bailey, go on. Any more nuggets left?"

"Plenty. I was goin' to give most of 'em to Grace for a wedding present."

Drury frowned.

"There won't be any wedding if yuh ain't blamed careful, youngster. Yuh seem to be messing things up pretty badly. Maybe it ain't too late. You're goin' to take me an' the sergeant to the place you've cached the nuggets and then to the place where you claimed to have found them. See?"

"I won't do anything of the sort," Bailey said hotly. "Why should I show you, a stranger—"

"Jack," the girl cried appealingly.

"And don't be a bigger fool than you can help," the sergeant said disgustedly. "Don't you see Drury, here, is trying to help you out of a nasty mess.

"The only real evidence against you is the way you've been getting gold. Prove you came by it honestly an' the case falls through—not that you'll have cleared your name. Finding the gold don't explain exactly why your prospecting trips always coincided with a murder. But as far as I know law, that fact ain't evidence of any sort against you."

"I can explain that, I betcha," Drury said. "I'm willing to gamble he was in the *dorp* here the time the first couple or so of murdering hold ups was done. An' then, because he liked the thrill, he deliberately acted so's he'd make folks think he was the guilty one. Well—I reckon he got a bigger thrill than he counted on. A neck stretching entertainment ain't exactly thrilly to the feller who's goin' to get his neck stretched. Ain't it the truth?"

Young Bailey shivered in spite of his determination.

"I've been a fool," he admitted. "It's just as you say. I acted the way I did because I thought it would make me look big in the eyes of the men at the *dorp*. They've made fun of me ever since I came out here from home; said I hadn't guts for anything. An' I thought—"

"My Gord! What a fool kid you are. Now you an' yore sister go outside a minute or two. You'll be on yore honor not to try any getting away tricks. An', if you're tempted that way, just remember a bullet from my revolver can travel some faster than you can run—an' there'll be still the rope party waiting for yuh."

"I won't run," Bailey said as he and his sister, her eyes shining with happy confidence now, passed out of the hut.

"You think it's wise," the sergeant asked when he and Drury were alone.

Drury nodded.

"I'm banking on his sister. The little lady strikes me as having a good share of sense.

"Now never mind them. You just listen to me. Have you ever talked with the captain about these affairs?"

The sergeant nodded.

"Yes. But it didn't do any good. He's close when he wants to be. I came to the conclusion he had a clue an' wanted to work it out himself. God knows he's put enough time on the case. Always going off investigating."

"On his own?"

The sergeant nodded again.

"Yes. Wouldn't even take a nigger orderly with him. He's a keen man, is the captain. Knows Africa from A to Z."

"An' you think it's no use me trying to see him?"

"I don't think—I know. Nurse told me he wasn't allowed to see any one. Seems he's raving all the time about being on the track of Jack the Ripper. Though he's been better since Bailey was arrested."

"Ah! Sounds bad. Let's hope he gets over it. What's he like?"

"Why—" the sergeant hesitated—"come to think of it, he's hard to describe. Medium build, dark hair and eyes, clean shaven—and that about lets him out."

"Man!" Drury was very caustic. "The way you describe him makes him stand out before me. Has he got any peculiarities?"

The sergeant shook his head.

"None to speak of."

"My Gord!" Drury exclaimed disgustedly. "An' how long you an' him been stationed here? Oh, never mind."

"If I knew what you were aiming at," the sergeant protested defensively.

"I don't know myself. I'm feeling my way. That's all. We've got nothing to go on—no starting place—'cept I'm blamed sure young Bailey ain't the guilty party." Drury was silent a moment. Then:

"Tomorrow I'm going to take Bailey to headquarters for trial. See that everybody knows it—after we've gone. And then—

"Well! Here's my plan. An' before you say it's no good, just remember we've got some fishing to do in muddied waters. We ain't got nothing in our favor save that we do know what bait to use."

"An' that is?" the sergeant asked, as Drury paused.

"Gold."

"I see, I think I undertsand. Go on."

"Yuh'd better take notes." Drury advised. "I ain't goin' to repeat."

IT WAS over two weeks later that Trooper Drury came at sundown to a flat-topped kopje known as Gallows Kop because native rebels were reputed to have been hanged on the trees which fringed its base.

"Reckon this is the place, all right," Drury mused. "There ain't another hill like this in sight. An' if I had any doubts —which I ain't—that pool with the funny looking rock hanging over it would settle 'em. That's where I'll camp an' then have a look-see if the sergeant's done all I told him.

"Get up there, Sally!"

This last was to his overladen pack mule, and with voice and stick he drove her on, walking close at her heels, halting finally beside the rock girded pool. There he released the mule of her load turned her loose and with rapid efficiency made camp. He erected a small one-man shelter tent; stored his provisions neatly under its shelter, gathered wood; lighted a fire; made up a camp bed and then, taking a small prospector's hammer, wandered idly about, tapping experimentally at rock outcrops, examining with close interest the chips his hammer broke off.

Gradually, as the red was fading from the western sky, he worked his way back to the pool and putting his hand down a cleft between the rocks extracted a small waterproof pouch.

He pocketed it and returned to his fire, which he replenished with logs, and prepared his evening meal.

That done he sat cross-legged on his blankets, his back against a rock, smoking thoughtfully—and listened.

All light faded from the sky. The red flames of the fire seemed an impertinence in the abysmal gloom.

The coffee boiled over with a pleasing

hiss, its scent mingling with the aromatic odor of the burning wood; the bacon was fried crisply; the flapjacks were baked.

With healthy appetite, enjoying every mouthful, Drury broke his fast.

His hunger satisfied, he washed his dishes, tethered the mule, cut several armfulls of long grass, which he put down before her, and returned once again to his blankets.

"I don't reckon I'll have any callers tonight," he muttered, and took out the waterproof pouch he had found in between the rocks. It contained a somewhat bulky letter, and this, holding it so that it was illumined by the firelight, he read:

> All instructions carried out. The news of your murder and Bailey's escape is the talk of the town! The miners are hot about it. It's a wonder they don't have a shot at lynching me! No one knows—not even the captain or Bailey's sister—that the youngster's in a safe place.
>
> These men left town shortly after the news of Bailey's escape came to hand.

Here followed a list of names with a description of the men. And Drury gave this close attention.

The letter continued:

> I'll also spread the rumors about a newcomer who's struck it rich near Gallows Kop. So if your deductions are correct you'll be having a visitor or two. So be careful.
>
> I think that's all. If I were a jealous man I'd be jealous of you—the way Grace talks about you. And if you succeed in clearing the brother—well, I'll be grateful too.
>
> I nearly forgot. The captain's better and on the warpath again. The news that Bailey had escaped seemed to act like a tonic on him—and when he heard about the newcomer to the district, the nurse at the hospital told me, he insisted on leaving at once. Said he'd got to protect the stranger within our gates, as it were.
>
> Funny, come to think of it, he's got a habit of running his finger round the inside of his collar—as if it were choking him—no matter how loose it is.
>
> Funny that I shouldn't have remembered that when you asked me first—not that it's important.
>
> Once again:
>
> Take care of yourself,
>
> SERGEANT JOHNSON."

Drury grunted as he reached the letter's conclusion.

"He hadn't ought to have written the letter," he complained. "Just the names and descriptions—that's all. Well, I reckon there's no harm done, though there might have been had any one else found this pouch."

He read the letter through again then held it to the flames.

"I may be a blamed fool," he continued, "acting this way, but I don't see how I could tackle the case any different. There ain't a blamed thing to go on. Just a suspicion here an' there—nothing else.

"Well, we'll see. Don't reckon I'll have any callers tonight, but I ain't taking chances. Going to sit up for a while."

He moved back from the fire, busied himself with his blankets and then moved still further into the darkness beyond the firelight, chuckling softly as he looked toward his blankets.

"It sure looks," he mused "as if somebody's sleepin' there."

Then he leaned back against a rock, his big bony hands clasped about his updrawn knees, and closing his eyes mentally surveyed the reports of the crimes he had been sent to investigate. Then his active brain turned to an examination of his plan and in imagination he retraced the course he had followed since its inspirational inception.

He had left Gwelo with Bailey and his departure had been very ostentatious. Every one knew of it; every one knew that he was taking the prisoner to Salisbury for trial. But, somewhere between Gwelo and Salisbury, he and his prisoner had vanished; later the rumors were started that Bailey had escaped, first killing his escort. Still later a bulletin issued by Sergeant Johnson had confirmed that rumor. At that time Bailey, under another name, was in prison, held as a vagrant while Drury, his hair cropped short and dyed black with ink, his dress that of a prospector, was making his way back by easy stages to Gallows Kop, near which Robins and Next Time Sawley had been killed.

Drury had decided to set a trap, using himself and a few of the nuggets discovered by young Bailey as the bait.

"You see," his thoughts ran, answering all possible objections to his plan, "I figured that this Jack the Ripper, having made his pile, was ready to quit the game. An', seeing as young Bailey got himself arrested an' likely to hang for it, he'd have been safe. With one man found guilty of a crime, folks ain't got no room in their brains to suspect anybody else. So I fakes Bailey's escape an' lets him murder me, figuring that the chap I want will decide to have another haul or two, and under the circumstances he'd figure he'd be quite safe. Course, everybody's on the lookout for Bailey an' if there's another murder and robbery done, Bailey'll be blamed for it. That's how the chap I want'll figure it out, I reckon.

"Well, here's me; a stranger to the district, prospecting on me own in a damn' lonely place. An' I've struck it rich, so they say! Well! I reckon I ought to be an easy mark for the Ripper chap to shoot at."

He tensed suddenly. His abnormally sensitive ears had detected an alien sound in the bush beyond him. His hand crept to his revolver, his fingers closed caressingly about the butt.

Apart from that he did not move, save to turn his head slightly in the direction of the noise.

A dry twig cracked; a pebble rolled from under an unwary foot; the labored breathing of a man concentrating too heavily on silence sighed through the night.

Drury saw for one brief, shadowy moment the form of a man crouching by the side of a rock the other side of the fire, opposite him. Drury drew his revolver—cursed softly. The man had vanished.

Drury waited, inwardly cursing his slowness. He should have shot on sight. He—

The noise of a man passing through the bush recommenced. Another twig cracked; a few moments later, another—farther away.

Then all sound ceased, but still Drury listened, his ear to the ground now.

Presently, as if the earth were a hollow drum, he detected the galloping beat of a horse's hoofs, going away.

"'S funny," Drury muttered as he returned his revolver to its holster.

Then he completely relaxed, closed his eyes and in a few moments was sleeping peacefully.

Nevertheless, he was not completely unprotected. His subconscious kept alert watch over him. Though he did not stir when his mule suddenly took it into her head to roll, and did so with much pawing of hoofs on the hard ground, a gentle, vagrant breeze, tainted with a lion's scent, aroused him instantly and he did not again relax until his knowledge of things African assured him that the beast was nowhere in his vicinity.

THE DAY which followed was an extremely busy one. After breaking his fast Drury set to work at his ostensible profession of prospecting. Not once did he relax his efforts; not once did he evince any sign that his labors were futile ones, that they were simply part of a pose. Occasionally he capered wildly about as he examined a piece of quartz, acting the part of a man who has struck a rich vein.

Certainly his actions would have lent themselves to such an interpretation to any one who might be watching him, from a distance, through field glasses.

During his brief midday halt he received a caller, a scrubby little cockney mounted on a bony nag.

Drury looked at him belligerently.

"What the hell do you want?" he growled.

" Ow! Come off yer bloomin' perch," the cockney replied. "I was just ridin' this way an' called to pass the time of day."

"Well, havin' passed it, you can pass on. I've got nothing for you."

"Blimme! That's a 'ell of a w'y tew tork." Through close set eyes the cockney surveyed Drury's mining operations. " 'Ave yer struck it rich, cully?" he asked.

"That's my business," Drury answered

fiercely, drawing his revolver with a threatening flourish.

The cockney giggled fatuously.

" 'Ow!" he exclaimed. "I sees you 'ave, else yer wouldn't be so touchy. So s'y cully, 'ow abart takin' me hin as yer partner? I'm a 'andy man ter 'ave around—"

"You'll be a dead 'un if you don't vamose pretty quick," Drury growled.

"I'm agoin'," the cockney said hurriedly. "An' I 'opes the blinkin' murderer cuts yer throat."

With that he spurred his horse and galloped away.

An hour later Drury received another visitor. It was the sallow man through whose straw hat Drury had put a bullet the day the miners had come out to lynch Bailey.

Drury, remembering that this man had been one of the leaders of the lynching party, tensed slightly as the man drew rein beside him.

"Say, mister," the sallow one began: "Are you aware that I pegged out this claim, an', accordingly, you ain't got a right to work it?"

"But I am," Drury replied. "What's more, I'm agoin' ter keep on working it. Not that it's much damned good."

"You mean to tell me that," the other asked incredulously. "Why I heard you'd got a good thing an'—"

"You can't always tell about rumors," Drury interrupted easily. "Course, I'd admit I've found something an'—see here! What's your game? You ain't got no claim on this ground."

"Ah! You don't have to talk like that. I'll admit I was only bluffing when I said I'd pegged out a claim here. But let me make you a proposition. You need capital to develop this thing properly and I can get it. Take me in with you and I'll be responsible for buying the mill and all that. And I'll be content with fifty per cent. of the takings. That's generous."

"Sure is," Drury grinned. "Generous as hell, but I ain't taking it. Now—get out."

"Twenty-five per cent. I'll take."

"Nope. And this is my busy day."

"Ten per cent. then, an' that's positively the lowest I'll offer."

"An' I ain't a-takin' it," Drury retorted as he clumsily drew his revolver. "On your way, unless you want a doctor prospecting for lead in your carcas."

The other hesitated a moment then, cursing, spurred his horse viciously and rode away.

The sun was low when Drury's third visitor arrived.

He was a big blackbearded Dutchman.

"Ma-an," he began impulsively, "what you have found here is not my business—no. But you are a newcomer, not? Maybe you have not heard of the stinking hyena of a man who kills lonely prospectors like you and robs them. Almighty! If I could get my hands on him! My brother he killed. *Ach sis!* The swine. So, because I want to see my brother avenged, I come to warn you. I come to offer my services to you. I do not want pay—Almighty, no! I want only that you let me stay here with you and pretend to be your partner. Then, if that man of evil comes we two can handle him—not?"

"I'm sure obliged to you, Dutchy," Drury drawled. "But I reckon to play a lone hand. I've heard all about this skunk, an' I'll be looking for him. I ain't as green as I maybe look. From what I've heard he has a way of showing up at sundown. Well! It's most that now. An'—" for the third time he drew his revolver—"how do I know you ain't him?"

The Dutchman stared at him, mouth agape.

"You *verdoemte* fool," he roared indignantly. "All this way I come to warn you an'—"

"I ain't a-takin' chances," Drury interrupted, "an' the sooner you get out of my sight, the better I'll like it. I'm blamed nervous an' the way my finger's trembling on the trigger, I shouldn't be surprised if this here gun went off by itself. So—"

"Almighty, what a fool. Tomorrow I'll ride this way again and if you haven't been murdered, maybe I'll talk sense into you."

"Maybe. Only don't come round sundown. I'm touchy about then an' liable to shoot at sight."

The Dutchman swore impatiently, shrugged his shoulders and, with a muttered, "S'long!" rode away.

IT WAS the hour of sunset.

Drury, squatting on his heels, was busily occupied frying bacon for his evening meal.

Presently he looked up with a well simulated start of surprise and cheerfully acknowledged the greetings of the horseman who now rode up.

"Offsaddle an' let's eat, stranger," he continued. "I'm sure glad to see you."

Under cover of his cooking operations he covertly watched the stranger dismount. He was a man of medium build. A wide brimmed slouch hat shaded his eyes and he moved as if he were ill or tired—or both.

Stuck in his belt was a revolver and, Drury noted, its position made a quick draw possible.

Silently the sundowner sat down by the fire, opposite Drury, and ate the food Drury passed to him.

"You sure look done in," Drury commented.

"I am," the other agreed and ran a finger around the inside of his shirt collar, pulling at it as if it were choking him. "Ridden nearly fifty miles—an' I've had no food since yesterday sundown."

"Eat hearty then," Drury advised. "But say—where you heading for?"

"I heard a prospector had struck it rich here and I thought I might be able to stake a claim near by. I suppose you're the prospector? That rumor was a true one, wasn't it?"

Drury appeared to hesitate.

"Well, in a way it is. I found a lode—a damned rich one. I'll show you some of the stuff later. But there ain't anything else here. I've cleaned up an' I'm on my way to the dorp tomorrow."

The other sighed.

"That's always my luck—to come too late."

He threw a log on the fire, sending a rain of golden sparks flying upward.

He pulled again at his shirt collar.

"Do you mind," he asked tentatively, "if I see what you found now?"

Drury nodded sleepily.

"Help yourself," he muttered. "They're in a canvas bag under my blankets."

The sundowner rose and crossed to Drury's blankets. His course took him behind Drury and that man, seeming to lose his balance, fell over backward. But, though he seemed somewhat dazed, his eyes were fixed on the sundowner and his right hand closed on the butt of his revolver.

He sat up with a sheepish laugh when the other returned to his former position and, by the light of the fire, examined the contents of the bag.

"Yes," the sundowner sighed as he tossed the bag over to Drury. "Some folks have all the luck. You've got a tidy fortune there. But you ought to be more careful. Somebody might steal it from you."

"Who's going to try that in this country," Drury said with a chuckle. "Now me—I'm blamed sleepy; been working hard. I'm goin' to turn in; got to make a early start in the morning."

He rose to his feet and backed toward his blankets. In a few moments, the canvas bag still clutched in his left hand, he was snoring loudly.

But if he snored, one eye was open and did not miss the sundowner's slightest movement. Though he snored, he listened intently during the brief interval between each snore.

Even so his quick ears, his ability to pick out individual sounds from the tone symphony the veldt is always playing, failed to detect a stealthy rustling in the bush behind him. Perhaps that was because he had concentrated all his faculties on the man by the fire.

After a time the sundowner rose from his place by the fire, lazily stretched himself and, taking a blanket from his saddle roll, wrapped himself in it. A few minutes later his snores kept pace with Drury's.

Again there was a rustling noise in the bush; again Drury did not hear it. He was watching the sundowner, and smiled grimly as he saw the man free himself from the blanket and draw his revolver.

His revolver leaped to his hand at the same moment that the sundowner fired.

A second report followed the first so quickly that it seemed its echo. But the second report came from the bush behind Drury.

With a wondering, cursing grunt, Drury rolled swiftly from his blankets to a rock which sheltered him from the fire of the sundowner and the unknown in the bush.

Again the sundowner fired and, at an answering shot, collapsed with a gasp as if a heavy missile had knocked all the wind from his body.

Now Drury took a hand in the game, firing three rapid shots in the direction of the last flash in the bush. His challenge was soon answered. A bullet hit the top of the rock which sheltered him and whined its way viciously over his head. Three more shots followed the first.

"That's six," Drury muttered grimly as he staggered to his feet. "Sure hope he ain't a two gun man an' that I can get down again afore he reloads."

He reeled forward a few uncertain paces, clawing at the air as if for support, then pitched face forward to the ground, his head and body behind a rock outcrop, his legs asprawl, and was very still.

For awhile there was silence, broken at length by the sound of a man cautiously parting the bushes.

"He's clever," Drury thought. "He's made a circle an's now opposite the place where he was shooting. An' that means I ain't under cover any more. Hell! I feel like a tortoise with a blamed vulture sittin' on my back waitin' for me to put my head out—only my head is out! I sure hope this guy ain't observant an' thinks I'm dead; else I will be."

A report sounded and a bullet thudded into the ground close to one of Drury's outstretched legs. He shuddered slightly, hoping to convey the impression that the bullet had entered his body.

With unhesitating steps, confident of his shooting prowess and that he had nothing to fear from the two men who sprawled so silently on the ground, the stranger came forward. Coming to the sundowner, he paused for a moment, his revolver ready to spit death should that man move. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, whistling gaily, he went on toward his goal, the canvas bag of nuggets which was lying in plain sight on the top of Drury's blankets.

Suddenly, warned by a sound behind him, he whirled sharply, snarling a curse—and fired at the sundowner, who, raising himself painfully on his left elbow was endeavoring to take aim with the revolver he held in his right hand.

But the stranger's aim was hurried, his shot went wild, and before he could fire again Drury fired—and did not miss. The heavy bullet crashed into the stranger's forehead, between the eyes, dropping him as the clean cut of an ax drops rotting logs.

IT WAS half an hour later.

Drury, having bandaged the sundowner's wound and arranged the dead man's body for packing into headquarters, made coffee which the two men drank in silence.

The sundowner was evidently unnerved by the ordeal he had been through and even Drury, now that the affair was over, was conscious of the strain the hours of waiting had subjected him to.

He said now, quietly to the sundowner:

"Say, cap—you're O. C. of the Gwelo Troop, ain't you? Say something!"

The other started.

"You know me, then?"

"Sure! It's this little trick of yourn." He ran his fingers round the inside of his shirt collar.

"Then who are you?" the captain demanded.

"Me, I'm Trooper Drury, sent on special duty to investigate—"

"Drury—Dynamite Drury?" the captain ejaculated. "I've heard of you. But—aren't you murdered? I mean—"

Drury laughed.

"Not so's you'd notice it." He explained the plan he had worked.

"An' you know," he concluded, "I came near putting a bullet in you tonight. You see I'd figured it out that you might be the man responsible for these here killings—the way you kept things to yourself an' went off alone. Just what game were you playing?"

The captain hesitated, then with a burst of confidence.

"I'll tell you, Drury, trusting you to keep my secret. This man was my sister's husband. He was always a bad lot; though he broke her heart by his ill-treatment—God! He used to beat her—she continued to love him; still loves him and teaches her children to believe their father is the finest man ever God made.

"He deserted her a year ago and came out here to avoid trouble with the police over some unsavory affair in England. He had a little money, money my sister starved herself in order to send him; and for my sister's sake I used to give him some.

"For six months he haunted me. Then he vanished and a report came in that he had died of blackwater. But when these murders began I *knew* he wasn't dead. But suspicions aren't proof—you know *that*—and I had no proof. I didn't know where he was. So I came after him myself, determined he should not be brought to trial, determined to kill him myself and bury him as an unknown, thus sparing my sister and her children from the shame of knowing husband and father was a murderer.

"He was too clever for me. Though I posed as a lucky prospector, as you have done, and haunted the loneliest part of the *veld*, waiting night after night, he never came to me.

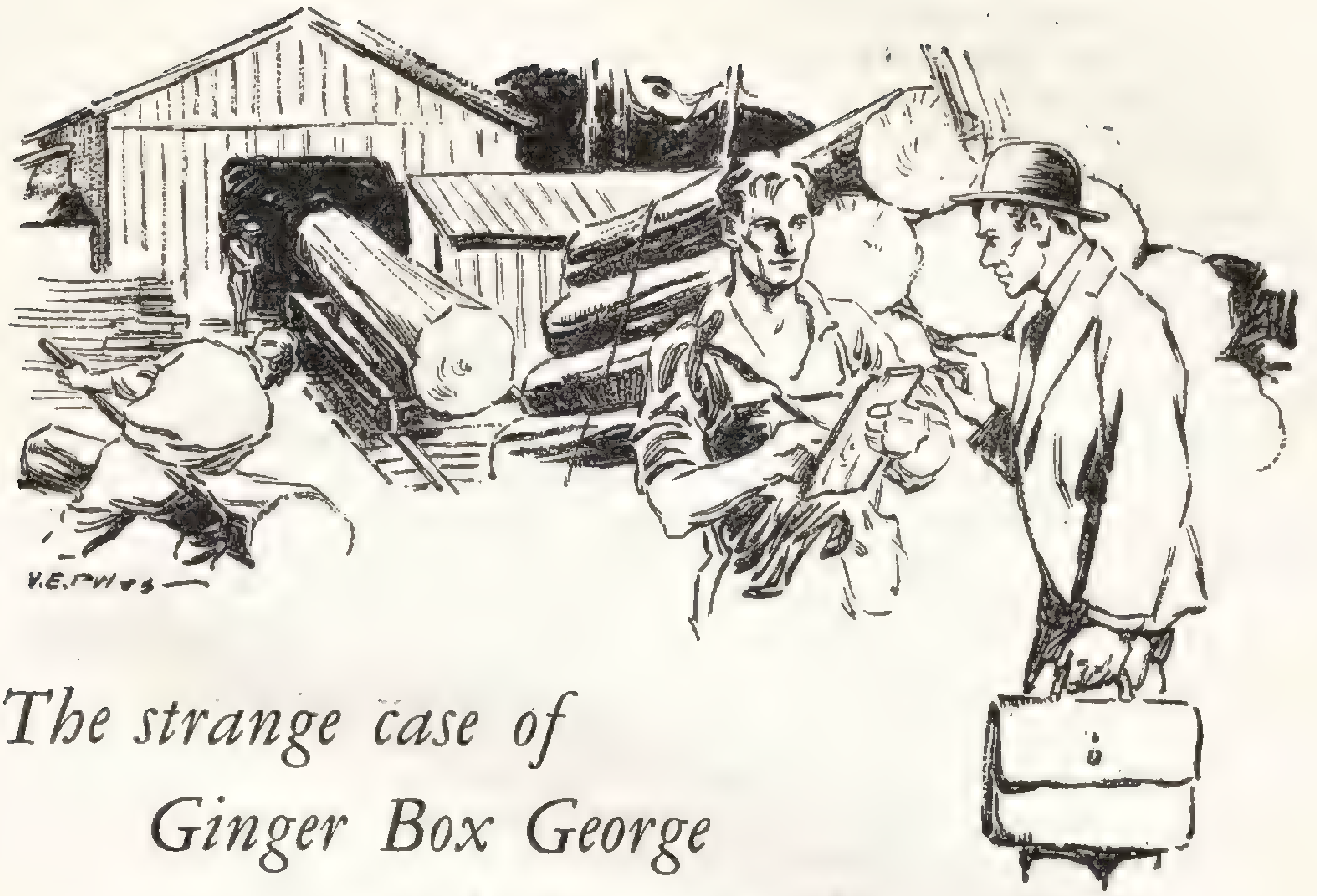
"Then, when young Bailey was arrested I tried to make myself believe that my suspicions were false ones; but I knew Bailey was innocent and yet—

"It was worrying over that which made me ill. And when news came of your murder and Bailey's escape, I was still convinced of Bailey's innocence. And so I left the hospital and took to the trail again. Finally, hearing of a man's lucky strike, headed here and found you—and that's all."

"It's enough," Drury said grimly. "But why did you act the way you did? Why didn't you tell me who you were an' what your plan was? An' when you asked to see the nuggets I was ready to gamble you was the man I wanted. I was all set to put a bullet in you."

"I know," the captain said seriously. "But I had to act that way; I had to take that chance. You see, I knew he was hiding near by and—"

"My Gord!" Drury groaned in tones of mock dismay. "I sure made a mess of this case!"



The strange case of Ginger Box George and the burning mills

Enough Rope

By A. R. GARRETT

THE MILL was sawing again after six weeks' shutdown. Out in the yard lay the warped columns of the old head saw, buried beneath a dozen shapeless things that had once been racked band saws ready for the filer. Fire, sweeping up from the engine room, had licked the building to charred embers and the steel machinery to red, shapeless stuff that would turn out no more timbers.

But things were as they had been, now. "Ginger Box" George Smith had been up to his tricks again—the pyromaniac that all the mill-workers feared. A little ginger box filled with black powder; a match struck at night while the watchman was in the planing mill; the mill itself in flames; Smith gone to the torture chamber of his conscience. It was always the same story. The destructive passion of the man had become a legend of the mills.

A new carriage was shot forward on new tracks—new planks formed the floor and deck—a new head saw strained in its harness of steel guides to tear at the twisted fibers of a spruce log.

It might have been animal, that saw. As if driven with hunger it bore down upon the three-foot hardwood butt, drooling wet saw dust at its teeth instead of blood—the sawmill's steel goddess, a glutton whose gullets were ever insatiable;

and before her men, mechanical figures, bending in subservience to the vicious feasting sounds.

When she finished the cut they snapped to action, the sawyer first with a jerk of the carriage lever, the off bearers scurrying to clear away the dropped morsels, the deck men and the block setter straining and sweating to prepare the logs for further sacrifice.

But the rumor was that Ginger Box George would come back. He would come back, perhaps, to some unsuspecting mill to hire out as an edgerman, a trucker—anything, as long as it was work in a mill. Perhaps some mill man would be too smart for him. Sooner or later George might find his little box of black powder quite useless in a cell.

ALL THE way up from Eagle River Simpson had felt a longing to talk to some one. A man of many words, a disciple of small talk, he felt keenly the fact that he drove alone. The road had taken him through two small settlements where he might have chatted with a garageman or a gas station attendant, but the salesman had not stopped, eager to get to Burr Springs.

So just beyond, when Simpson came upon a red mackinaw clad figure sloughing along in the damp clay of the road through the timber cañon, he stopped the car.

"Give you a lift," he offered.

He saw the man hesitate a moment, start forward, hang back and then clamber into the Dodge roadster. Simpson looked him over, quickly sizing him up for one of the pine stump farmers of the locality who were generally hard bitten, yet whole souled fellows, and at once he settled down behind the wheel with the complacent mien of a man whose momentary desire has been gratified.

His passenger assumed no such relaxation. He half held his body forward from the leather cushions, neck stiff, his eyes focused through the windshield on the road. The mackinaw he wore must have been for protection from the rain, for the May morning was humidly warm. He was a man almost as undersized as Simpson, but weather tanned where the salesman was sallow, and virile where the driver was nervously active.

"Well," Simpson said, "it hasn't got to raining yet today—dark enough to. Had lots of rain up here, I guess. Folks down at Eagle River sure are sore. Logging off those hills is bad enough when it's dry. Farmers are sore, too. You a farmer?"

"Yeah, I do a little farmin'."

There was nothing peculiar in the voice, rather a slow drawl, but at the sound of it Simpson twisted his head for closer scrutiny of the face.

"Something about you is familiar, brother," he said. "What's your name?"

"Shawkey."

"Ever work in the sawmills around here?"

"No, no," he said quickly. "Never hardly been out of the county. Maybe you saw me in Fry's Pool Room in Antigo; I worked there for a while."

"Well, maybe, but you looked like a mill man I've seen somewhere. I sell saws—Trent saws—and I see a lot of people. You live around here?"

"Yeah. Say! I remember you now and I guess you're cockeyed right! You seen me in a mill all right. I wasn't so sure I wanted to let on who I was until I figured out who you was. Your name's Simpson, ain't it?"

Simpson's face clouded in perplexity.

"That's right. What do you mean—you wanted to cover up, didn't want to be recognized? Your name's not Shawkey, then?"

"Yes, but it wasn't always. Maybe if I had the guts you've got I could keep on using my right name and get away with it." He chuckled gutturally and turned a piercing eye upon Simpson.

THE SALESMAN by this time was fully aware that something was wrong, and his very inability to recall where he had seen this Shawkey kept him from preparing some defense against the fellow's insinuations.

"I don't get you, Shawkey—or whatever your name is. Open up. Who do you think I am?"

"If my memory ain't gone haywire, you're the bird that stole them diamond drills and tools out o' that Newcastle Chair Works down in Indiana about four years ago."

A smile flitted across the salesman's face. It was by way of a relief to know of what he was accused, yet it aggravated his fogginess as to the other's identity. He had racked his brain to connect some characteristic of the man with some incident, but could arrive nowhere.

"Your memory's all right, Shawkey. I thought everybody had forgotten about that. There was a little noise and excitement for awhile, but it didn't last long. I'd come near forgetting it myself. You must have been working there then, eh?"

"Workin' on a lathe there and you was filin' saws. I guess you remember everything right enough—and I guess Swasey and Lemmon'd think back in a hurry if they run across you. It's a good thing you ain't sellin' saws in Indiana. You got plenty o' guts showin' your face around here as it is."

Simpson twisted his face in a deprecating gesture.

"Not a chance of anybody connecting me with that now. That was five years ago. Maybe it was there I saw you and your face and voice stuck with me. I've sure seen you around somewhere. You say you live near Burr Springs?"

"Yeah. I work in the mill—deck scaler. How long you been on this job?"

"Oh, I've been selling saws about three years now. You're wondering how I've kept the job after that little indiscretion down in Newcastle. Well, Shawkey—or whatever your name is—I learned my lesson that time and haven't done anything like that since. I use my head on this job enough to make it interesting, but I don't steal."

The man Shawkey screwed his face into a knot and snorted.

"I know how you birds work. You don't steal, maybe, but you get a filer or a sawyer a job somewhere and get him to plug your saws until the mill has got to order 'em. It ain't like stealin' diamond drills but—say!"

Simpson had slowed the car to light a cigar and when he had it smoking, had flung the match out into the road. At his passenger's sudden "Say!" he looked up, reaching for the shifting lever. Shawkey caught his arm.

"Say, you birds give me a pain in the gizzard. There's a State law against throwing a lighted match out of a car. Know that?"

Simpson shook the arm loose and threw his head back carelessly as he put the car in gear.

"No harm to that one, Shawkey. That clay won't burn—don't you worry. You couldn't fire these woods with a blow torch after all these rains."

"No? Well, tell a ranger that. You'd play hell tryin' to get that across."

"Woof, woof! Brother, you sure carry a chip on your shoulder. Why the rough words?"

"I live up here and I know what forest fires is."

The car sped on through the timbered cañon, Simpson somewhat defeated in his desire to talk by Shawkey's sudden mood. The latter had slumped down in the seat, watching the oncoming road with a dreamy fascination. Presently above the sound of the motor came the muffled *whush* of a band saw and the car came out into the clearing that was Burr Springs. Shawkey sat up.

"I'll get out at the next road."

"I was wondering why you weren't working this morning," Simpson said with a trace of sarcasm. "Didn't know deck men had so soft jobs that they could take the morning off."

"Foreman let me off to see a sick fellow up where you picked me up. See you later. Much obliged for the ride."

THE SALESMAN watched him go as a cat regards a mouse that has slipped out of her claws, and with a regret at not having asked the fellow more questions. Reluctantly he drove on to the mill and parked his car in the flower bordered yard of the small office building. He stood for a minute beside the car, struck a match to light the dead stump of his cigar and stared thoughtfully at the flame. Then he flung the match down and ground it into the earth with the heel of his shoe.

He swept into the outer office with his usual breezy greeting to the bookkeeper and clerk and, seeing the superintendent's expansive back through the doorway of his office, circled the counter and planted his feet familiarly in front of Hutchinson's desk.

"Hello, Hutch! What do you say?"

Hutchinson, never a genial man, but one commercially polite, made Simpson an exception. He openly admitted he did not like the man. "The cuss gets on my nerves," he would say. "I refuse to be civil to him. He's with a good house and all that, but he's no credit to it. I wouldn't let him come around if I didn't think Trent saws were the best I could buy." So now he looked up momentarily from a letter he was reading, dropping his eyes almost at once.

"No use looking for any business around here. Two of your saws went bad on us and we had to order two new ones. Looked like rotten steel to me, but the filer said they'd been running against the guides and got hardened up. Damn these dumb heads that wait for something to happen before they see what's wrong!"

"Well, Tom Bland's a good filer. He ought to know. Got the trouble stopped now?"

Had Hutchinson intended to reply, the words would have been checked. The salesman had hooked his foot around a chair and drew it up, spreading his hand across the letter in the superintendent's hands.

"Listen, Hutchinson, what if you did spend a few hundred dollars for a couple of new saws. You'll forget it quick enough when I tell you that you've got Ginger Box George Smith working in your mill!"

The words drew blood as Simpson had known they would. In spite of the shell of coldness that Hutchinson had drawn around him, the letter in his hands sagged, and he raised his heavy, baggy face.

"Ginger Box George Smith! Are you trying to kid me?"

"Kid, hell, man! I tell you I know it."

"Why, he wouldn't come here. There's a thousand dollar reward for finding him!"

"I know it—sure. And I know Smith when I see him. He's just crazy enough to come back to any mill when he figures he's stayed away from sawmilling as long as he can. He'll work in a place just so long, and then he gets the idea he ought to set fire to it. He fills his ginger spice box full of powder and heaves it through a window at night. Then he skips and stays away as long as he can. He just happened to come back here, that's all. He's got the nerve of Napoleon, that guy, but this is one time he's going to lose."

The flesh on the superintendent's cheeks hung loose in overwhelming unbelief.

"But, here—in this mill! Why does he pick on us? He hasn't got anything against this place. The devil must know I've got half a million feet of ties waiting for the inspector. You say you know him? Which man is it?"

"Says his name is Shawkey. He's just an ordinary little guy—a skinny little bird with a rough face and funny looking little eyes, like a ferret's. You remember his picture in the papers."

AT THAT Hutchinson pulled his bulk out of the swivel chair with as much alacrity as he could mobilize and fumbled in one of the wall filing cases, returning to the desk with an envelope. He spilled its contents of press clippings upon the desk top.

"Here's the stuff about him. Lord, you've got me sweating, Simpson. I know this Shawkey. He's a deck scaler. He's been here some time. I can't believe he could be George Smith. He looks all right to me."

"I tell you I know he's Smith. You ought to be scared stiff with a cuckoo like him around. Here, look at that."

Hutchinson bent over the smudgy rectangle of George Smith's face. Simpson went on:

"Isn't that Shawkey? Listen to this." He read from the article over the superintendent's shoulder:

> "Smith is clearly a pyromaniac, but only periodically. At all other times he is perfectly rational, showing no symptoms of his insanity except an abhorrence for fire in any form. He does not smoke—a probable result."

"There you are, Hutch. Listen: I picked him up seven or eight miles back on the road, and we talked awhile before I could figure out who he was. I happened to light this cigar and threw the match out in the road. Say, he had forty fits, wanted me to go back and put out the match. Said something about a State law. Believe me, Shawkey is Ginger Box George and we've got to get rid of him."

The big man sank into his chair and poked at his cheek with a pencil.

"Damn it! I believe you're right. Seems to me this Shawkey did come here right after that Bear Creek fire. How will we get rid of him?"

"We've got to be delicate about it. You can't run him out bodily or even hold him until the sheriff gets here. He'd start a fire in his grave if he wanted to bad enough. But whatever we do we can't let him suspect we know who he is. Here—I've got the idea! I know of a sawyer's job in Rhinelander—Levine and Clark's mill. I'll get to talking with Smith and tip him off to the job. Then I'll drive him over and turn him over to the sheriff. We'll split the reward."

"What if he won't go?"

"Say, how many scalers get a chance to get sawing jobs? He'll step on himself getting there. And the point is—Smith is a good sawyer. He can do anything around a mill. Doesn't care much what it is as long as he can hear that old band saw ripping hell out of the logs. He'll go quick enough to a two hundred and fifty dollar job. Wait till I get talking with him. O. K?"

"Sounds all right to me, if it works. Anything to get him out of here. It's got me weak, Simpson."

"Don't worry. Little Oscar will fix Mr. Ginger Box George. Leave it to me. I'm going out to say hello to Tom Bland and I'll see you after I've talked with Smith."

Through the window Hutchinson watched the salesman walk across the mill yard and mount the incline to the sawing floor. He perused the clippings for a few minutes and then closed the door into the outer office. Back and forth in front of his desk he paced, his fleshy brow pursed in deep thought. He stopped short and lifted his head, walking to a smaller file of cards on top of the filing cases. He found one that brought more furrows of perplexity and he wiped the perspiration from his forehead with a moist hand.

HIS SPRINGY step took Simpson up the cleated incline. If the momentous presence of Ginger Box George Smith in the Burr Springs Mill and his own job of the ridding the mill of the man weighed on him, the eagerness in his face was no evidence of it. As he came out upon the floor the saw was screeching through a squared maple cant, Andy Tilson, the sawyer, gesturing his finger signals to the block setter at the carriage. There was but one man on the log deck and it was not Shawkey. Simpson crossed over and entered the filing room.

Bland did not hear him. When the salesman clapped him on the back he turned his cherubic face and short, stocky body around in a childlike wonderment, nearly dropping the swage from the tooth edge of the vised band saw.

"Hello, yourself, you little runt!" he greeted. "Where'd you come from?"

"Came up to hear how the new saws were working."

"Yeah? I got an idea you knew them other two was bad. And they was bad. No use telling me different. Course I didn't tell the old man that. You bet I didn't. I ain't a man to bellyache when you been as decent to me as you have."

Simpson patted his shoulder.

"That's all right, Tom. The old man likes you. He didn't kick much at having to order new saws, did he?"

"Kick? Say, he bucked like a snared wildcat. It wasn't no easy job arguin' him out of the notion that I ought to send them saws back to you He'd made me too, I guess, only I'd scrapped 'em already."

"Good boy, Tom. I've got a box of ropes for you in my grip. As a matter of fact and between us two, I did know those saws were bad. They'd been cut down from a pair of fourteen inch that had been returned from a mill down South. Of course, the factory figured they were all right and the saws got shipped up here before I knew it. Say, Tom, they aren't working the night shift now, are they?"

"Ain't been for three weeks and I'm cussin' glad of it. Got enough work without filin' for a night crew. Swika comes up from the planin' mill, but that big Polack ain't a filer. Why?"

"Just wondering if I couldn't get Hutch to take on a couple more saws. Figured you didn't have any too many on the rack for a double shift. My sales are way low this month and the house is hopping me for more business. Joe Swika still holding out on the high speed knives?"

Bland stuffed his cheek full of scrap tobacco and worked his lips until he had placed it right.

"That big stiff let some sticker bits go flooey on him last week and he got the old man to order one of them new motor machines instead of changin' to a new kind of knife—Trents."

"He'll come around. Say, Tom—" Simpson was standing in the doorway facing the open end of the mill—"who's the fellow that just come to work—up there on the log deck?"

Shawkey stood silhouetted against the square of light in the opening at the top of the log lift, his back to the sawing operations.

"Him?" the filer pointed. "Name's Shawkey. He ain't been here long. Don't know where he come from. Don't mix in much. Sometimes I get to talkin' to him up at the boardin' house, but he don't say much."

Simpson pulled the filer back to the saw bench.

"I won't tell you what's what, Tom—not now. Just keep your eyes open and your mouth shut and by tomorrow—well, that bird won't be here tomorrow. I'm going over to talk to him now."

THE DECK man was figuring on his footage board when Simpson hopped up on the platform. He looked up but went back to his marking.

"Well, George, I've got you placed now."

The salesman made no effort to guard his voice, the saw behind him whirring and biting into the maple logs again, drowning all other sounds.

"Figured you would sooner or later, only my name ain't George. You're wrong there."

"I suppose so," Simpson chuckled. "Well, anyway, Shawkey, I've got something to tell you."

The scaler pushed him back with a rigid arm.

"Look out. This ain't a hotel lobby. I'm scalin' logs and haven't got no time to gab."

He made his calculations of the log that dropped off the lift chain and rolled it against the top one on the slope. Simpson had been forced to sidestep the log but was undaunted.

"You're a crusty bird for a guy with as much on his mind as you've got. You've got a lot more to lose than I have. Better listen to me. Want a sawing job?"

The deck full, Shawkey signaled the pond man to ease up.

"A sawin' job?"

"Circle sawing—up at Rhinelander."

"Want to get me out of the way, eh? Well, I don't blame you. We'd both be safer, I guess. Only I ain't goin' to leave this place."

"Why not? This job I'm telling you about is a good one. Come down to earth, Shawkey. I'll admit frankly I'd feel safer with you in some other mill. But at the same time I know this job is open and it'll pay twice as much as this job here."

"I ain't much of a sawyer."

"You don't have to be in that place."

"Sounds fishy to me, Simpson. If it's so easy to hold down it'd be easy to get fired. No. Don't waste your time. This is a good job and a good mill and I'm stickin'."

Simpson crowded closer.

"Listen here, you fire eater! I could collect a reward for letting people know you're here. Better take my tip and beat it to Rhinelander tonight."

"What do you mean—reward? You rat faced galoot, get out of the way!"

Shawkey had snatched up the cant hook and forced the salesman to jump down to the lower level. He glared at him for a minute and then, turning his back, taped the log and entered his figures on the sheet. Simpson stared at the scaler for a full minute and then went reluctantly down the incline to the mill yard.

He found Hutchinson bent over his desk, writing. The superintendent looked up questioningly as Simpson flopped into the extra chair.

"Well, I saw him and I think he'll go to Rhinelander. He said it sounded good and he'd let me know in the morning."

"But, my Lord, man, he might set fire to the mill tonight and be gone by morning."

"Not a chance. He's held off so far and I guess he will one more night. He don't suspect anything. You know this George Smith's a sensible duck even if he does go off his bean sometimes. He figures he can use the extra money on this other job as well as anybody. Now I'm going to drive over to Bauer Brothers at Orkney this afternoon and I'll be back tonight. Be sure and don't say a word to anybody. We'll keep your mill whole and make a nice piece of change ourselves."

JUST before the mill whistle sirened five o'clock Simpson ran his car into the space beside the boarding house on the hill above the mill, washed his hands and face and was reading the morning paper from Antigo when the first of the heavy footed men came up the planked walk. Over the top of the paper Simpson eyed them through the window and when he picked out Shawkey he waited for him to slam the screen door. He wore a shrewd smile.

"Well, changed your mind yet?"

Shawkey seemed to be doing something with his mind, his small eyes jumping actively. Other men came in and the salesman walked across the room, jerking his head for the scaler to follow. The room was gradually being filled with wet haired, freshly scrubbed boarders, and Simpson talked low.

"You got a wire from Levine and Clark? I wired them this afternoon from Orkney that I had a good man here in Burr Springs and told them to wire you a definite offer. I knew you thought I was gassing you, but I wasn't. Sure, I'd like to have you plug Trent saws. It's a good job and we're both ahead of the game."

Shawkey, for the first time since the beginning of his ride into Butt Springs that morning, seemed to lapse into the rôle of Ginger Box George Smith. His eyes, usually carrying a rational liveliness, now grew colorless, as if his mind had leaped miles away. Finally, he brought his gaze back to Simpson and nodded.

"Looks all right. I'll go over with you in the morning and look it over. I got two days off."

"Fine. You won't regret it. The only hitch is that I can't get over to Rhinelander until later in the day. Have to go back to Orkney. You ought to be there first thing. The only thing you can do is to walk to the junction and catch that two o'clock train in the morning. I'll fix it with Hutchinson and get your check for you. I've got a good drag with him."

Shawkey went on up the stairs with none of the sprightliness of his wiry, active frame, his eyes fixed. As soon as he was gone long enough to be in his room, Simpson jumped into his car and drove down the hill. Hutchinson was just closing the office door behind him.

"Everything's jake, Hutchinson. I pulled a smart one—wired Levine and Clark this afternoon to offer Shawkey a chance at their job. They did and he's going. We're all set. The only thing is that Bauer wants me to come back in the morning and check up some knives. I can't drive Smith to Rhinelander, so I've fixed it with him to walk to the junction and catch the two o'clock train. He'll get to Rhinelander and they'll try him out. I'll get there in the afternoon and have the sheriff pick him up."

"That's bad, Simpson." Hutchinson's fleshy face clouded in a dozen wrinkles of concern. "Going down by the mill in the middle of the night that way, that fellow might think it was a fine chance to start a fire and get right out of town. If he did, you know he'd never stop at Rhinelander for that job."

"By the gods, Hutch, you're right. I'll drive him over to the junction myself. We can't take any chances. I'll see he gets on the train without doing any harm."

"Maybe he won't report at Levine's anyhow, and we'll be out our $1000. Why not have the sheriff meet the train in Rhinelander?"

"Because I want to be there when the pinch is made. You never can tell what these crooked sheriffs will do. Leave it to me, Hutchinson. Say, fix Smith up with his time, will you?"

The superintendent went back into the office, returning almost immediately.

"The bookkeeper will bring up the check when he comes to dinner," he said, climbing into his own car as Simpson started his.

In the boarding house they separated, Simpson seating himself beside Andy Tilson, the sawyer, noticing that this place was as far away from Shawkey as possible. Finished, he sought out the bookkeeper and procured the check. He found the scaler sitting alone on the porch steps and tendered the check to him.

"Good luck, Shawkey. You'll find that mill a good place to work. And say, that's going to be kind of lonely—walking those four miles to the junction. I'll drive you over. It won't take me half an hour altogether. In the meantime, I'm going to take a walk and then get some shut eye. Might be a good idea for you to turn in yourself; you've got four or five hours. I'll meet you right here at one o'clock."

SIMPSON lighted a cigar and walked up the hill to the end of the street and back again. He bought some chewing gum in the company store and found Hutchinson to give him a final word. After that he borrowed an alarm clock from the housekeeper and mounted the steps to his room.

A few minutes after one o'clock he was pouring oil into the engine of his car from a gallon can. Returning it to the rear compartment, he slammed the cover shut with an impact that rudely broke the stillness of the night. As he walked up the porch steps and opened the screen door he saw Shawkey quietly descending the dimly lighted stairway.

"Car's all set. Let's get going. We haven't got any too much time."

"Guess I'll lift a piece of pie or something before I go," Shawkey announced, starting for the kitchen by way of the dining-room.

"Let it go. There's an all night restaurant at the junction, in case you have time to eat. Don't expect any trouble or anything to go wrong with the car, but you never can tell. Let's go."

The main road to the junction was the continuation of the one upon which Simpson had driven into Burr Springs the morning before, and it was reached by going down the hill past the mill. But instead of going this way, the salesman headed the car in the opposite direction, south, turned to the left and entered the woods on a narrow, little used lane.

"Shorter way through here," he commented, before Shawkey could query the matter.

It was problematical, however, whether the scaler was alert enough to notice where Simpson was driving. He was uncommunicative, through drowsiness, and had little to say all the way to the junction. They drank some coffee in the restaurant, Simpson supplying what conversation there was, until the local whistled for the junction and squealed to a stop. Shawkey climbed aboard, aroused himself enough to say:

"Much obliged, Simpson. I can't figure out but what you're on the square. If you are, I'll plug your saws for you."

"Good! See you later."

When the train was at last in motion, Simpson settled down behind the wheel of his car and was on his way back to Burr Springs.

Half a mile from the mill he smelled smoke. He seemed to be driving into a westerly night breeze and it carried the acrid odor of burnt wood, smothered by water. Simpson pressed his foot on the accelerator and, when he came into the clearing, he swept into the yard and slid to a stop. A knot of men was gathered by the long shed of the assorting table, under the glare of a high voltage incandescent lamp.

Smoke was pouring from the windows of the filing room above them and a hose line played water over the side of the building. Only one or two of the men in the group were moving, and these deliberately, as though the excitement was over, the fire controlled.

Simpson was out of the car instantly, running up to the men.

"Hutchinson! For God's sake what's happened? Did Smith—why, how the devil could he have started the fire? He came right down from his room and we drove right off. Have you got it out? Did it do any damage? By the gods, this beats me!"

Simpson had been greeted by the white faces of the men. Hutchinson, Tom Bland, Joe Swika, Tilson and half a dozen hands—white faces contrasting with the black shadows. Simpson's bewilderment did not seem to break the pall of silence.

"I didn't go to sleep all night—watching him. I borrowed Mrs. Martin's alarm clock to let Smith think I didn't have anything on my mind. My room was almost opposite his and I watched his door pretty near every minute through the keyhole. I saw his light go out. But then I didn't hear any alarm clock. He might have slipped out of the windows. By God, maybe he did! Came down here and set fire to the mill and slipped back to come downstairs and meet me. The slippery devil! Hutchinson, it's my fault. I was too sure of him!"

HUTCHINSON nodded and idly kicked at a weed. The other men began to move about. The superintendent looked up at the roll of smoke coming from the filing room and turned up his collar against the chill of the night air.

"I guess that's right, Simpson. It's your fault. When a man gets an idea he wants to set a fire, his judgment is apt to be misled. Nothing matters, except setting the fire. He doesn't use his head. Well, this Ginger Box George Smith is going to come to the end of his journey pretty soon. There wasn't much damage done. The fire got pretty hot in there for awhile, but we got the jump on it. The boys are still in there with water.

"I don't expect we'll need any new saws, Simpson. The two you just sent down are still in the crate in the storehouse and we can get along. Maybe we can have these retempered—if they didn't get burned too bad. If I do need another pair, I'll wire your factory for them. Tom, here, just told me about the two saws you admitted were rotten, so I guess your company will ship us a couple more when we get down to the bottom of everything.

"That was a pretty shady trick, Simpson, but you might have got away with it if you hadn't been so damned greedy for more business and tried to burn up my mill. Give a man enough rope and he'll hang himself, they say.

"You had me going with this George Smith stuff until I checked up on Shawkey and found he was working here before the Bear Creek fire, even if he did look a little like him. I couldn't figure out just what your game was so I let you play out your hand. Last night I phoned up Charley Levine and found out he didn't have a saw job open and that he hadn't sent any wire to Shawkey. Then I phoned Bauer Brothers and found you hadn't been there.

"So I figured you went to Rhinelander, instead, yesterday afternoon and sent that telegram to Shawkey yourself. Even then I never believed you'd set fire to my mill. You must have got a can of ginger and the powder over there, too. We found the can under the windows there. The watchman saw you empty powder into a small wooden box and light it and throw it through the windows, but the filing room was ablaze almost at once and he couldn't go after you.

"But I knew you'd be back. It would look pretty much like a job Ginger Box George had done and you had enough guts to carry it off as such. But you know, Simpson, I've been doing some thinking this morning, and I've just told the boys I think you're this George Smith fellow yourself. George Smith was probably the first one you framed up on to leave a mill and then you got busy with your box of powder. It was a good stunt. The fire cleaned out the saws and you got some nice orders.

"You kept on finding jobs for men now and then and the fires were laid to Ginger Box George. The day after the fire, the men that left would be scared to stay anywhere near and nobody ever heard from them afterward. Well, I'm going to get some sleep. Do what you want to with him, boys, but you'd better let the sheriff have him when he gets here from Rhinelander. Don't try to set fire to the jail, Simpson. One of your hack saws on the bars would be safer."

The Military Strategy of Sun Tsu

By HAROLD LAMB

TWENTY-FIVE hundred years ago the first known textbook on the art of war was written. Its author was a Chinese general who had lost both legs in a battle.

Even twenty-five centuries ago military science was an old story to these warriors of Cathay, who had maneuvered army divisions—chariots, horse and foot—across Asia since the beginning of time. Strategy of the highest order was the rule of the day, or of the ages. When a campaign came to a critical point a temple was built in an isolated place within the lines, for the commanding general's undisturbed meditations. Within these temples the science of war came into being.

"All warfare," to quote the author of the oldest textbook, Sun Tsu, "is based on deception. Hence, when about to attack, we must appear unable; when carrying on operations we must seem inactive: when we are near we must lead the enemy to believe we are still far away. If he is taking his ease, give him no rest; if we wish him to attack, offer him a bait."

A nice example of deception was given by a general penned in a city with inferior forces. He wanted to put the enemy off guard. So he gave the weapons of his able-bodied soldiers to the women and old men of the city and sent them to man the walls. Then he collected all available silver—a large amount—in the place and dispatched it to the enemy, pleading for easy terms. When he was satisfied that the hostile forces were over confident, he got together all horned cattle, bound steel blades to the horns, and faggots to the tails. It was a dark and windy night. Setting fire to the faggots, he loosed the cattle through all the gates and when the enemy's lines had been thrown into disorder, sallied out with his warriors and won a decisive victory.

Another case where Sun Tsu's precepts were followed is that of the general Chao Shi, in 270 B. C. Chao Shi was approaching a hostile army of about equal strength in open country. For a week the shrewd Chinese leader advanced only ten miles or so a day and spent most of his time fortifying his camps at night. The hostile spies and scouts took due note of his hesitancy and anxiety—until Chao Shi abruptly made a forced march of a hundred miles in two days and a night, and surprised and routed the unprepared enemy.

Sun Tsu's instructions to scouts are worth quoting.

"Falling trees in a forest show that the enemy is advancing in force."

"Brush screens in thick grass mean that the enemy is moving elsewhere."

"The rising of birds in their flight is the sign of an ambuscade. Startled beasts indicate a sudden advance movement."

"When there is dust rising in a high column, it is the sign of chariots advancing; when the dust is low and spread out widely it indicates the advance of infantry. When it branches out, patrols or firewood parties have been sent out. Scattered clouds of dust moving to and fro signify that the enemy is encamping."

"Overtures and increased activity are signs that the enemy is about to advance, especially when the light chariots come out and form on the wings."

"When there is a great deal of running about and the soldiers fall into ranks, a decisive order has been given."

"When the soldiers lean on their spears, they are weary or faint from lack of food."

"If those who are sent to draw water begin by drinking themselves, the army is suffering from thirst. If they fail to take up an advantageous position when encamping they are exhausted."

"When an army feeds its horses with grain and kills its cattle for food, when the soldiers move out and leave no cooking pots hanging over the fires, that army is going to fight to the death."

Information—foreknowledge of the enemy's plans—is the vital thing with old Sun Tsu. Foreknowledge, he warns, does not come from consulting the soothsayers or from any amount of previous experience, reasoning or guessing. It is to be had only from other men—by which he means captives, or spies that have penetrated the enemy lines.

This ancient warrior of Cathay understood the character of enlisted men—and officers. "Do not punish soldiers before they have grown attached to you. Show confidence in your men, but insist that your orders be obeyed. Treat them like children and they will follow you over precipices; but if you are indulgent and unable to enforce commands your men will be spoiled children, and useless."

"Rare indeed," he remarks grimly, "is the general who can lead an invasion without thought of his own glory, or a retreat without dread of disgrace."

Sun Tsu's book was translated by a Jesuit priest in the eighteenth century, and was studied by Frederick the Great. Napoleon appears to have profited by it, and the German strategists of Von Moltke's school.

And in twenty-five hundred years we have not improved on the rules laid down by old Sun Tsu. Preparation, he maintains, is the secret of strength in war; speed, the secret of success; and the ultimate aim of war is to bring peace again as soon as possible.

THE HIRED MAN ON HORSEBACK

By Eugene Manlove Rhodes

(With apologies to G. K. Chesterton)

> "The cowboy, after all, was never anything more than a hired man on horseback."
>
> —Editorial Page, Minneapolis *Tribune*, San Francisco *Chronicle*.

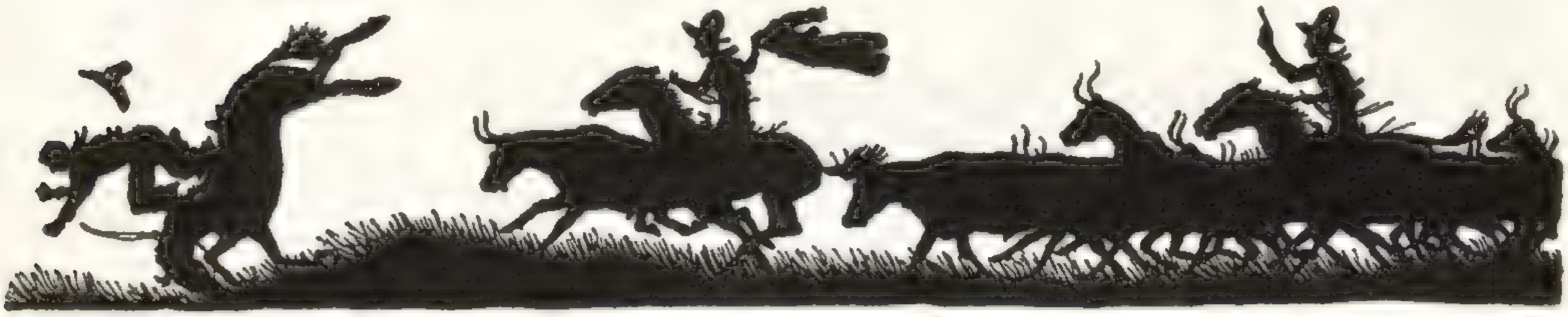
HARP and flute and violin, throbbing through the night,
Merry eyes and tender eyes, dark head and bright;
Moon shadow on the sun dial to mark the moments fleet,
The magic and enchanted hours where moonlight lovers meet:
And the harp notes come all brokenly by night winds stirred—
But the hired man on horseback is singing to the herd.
(Whoopie-ti-yo-o-o! Hi yo-o, my little dogies!)
Doggerel upon his lips and valor in his heart,
Not to flinch and not to fail, not to shirk his part;
Wearily and wearily he sees the stars wheel by,
And he knows his guard is nearly done by the great clock in the sky.
He hears the Last Guard coming and he hears their song begun,
A foolish song he will forget when he forgets the sun.
(Whoopie-ti-yo-o-o! Hi yo-o, my little dogies!)
"We got 'em now, you sleepy men, so pull your freight to bed,
And pound your ear an hour or two before the east is red."
If to his dreams a face may come? Ah, turn your eyes away,
Nor guess what face may come by dream that never comes by day.
Red dawn breaking through the desert murk:
The hired man on horseback goes laughing to his work.

Silhouettes by Paul Brown

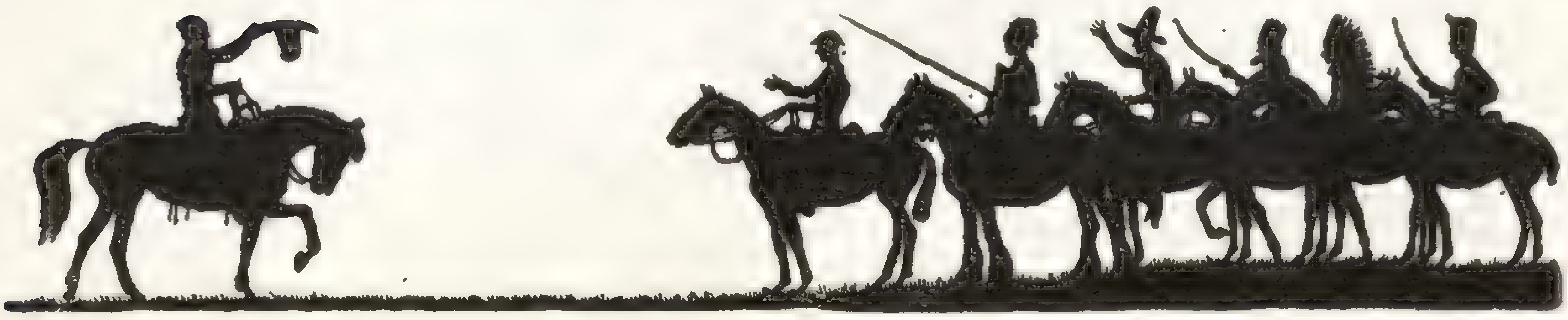
THE broker's in his office before the stroke of ten;
He buys and smiles and he sells and smiles at the word of other men;
But he gets his little commission flat, whether they buy or sell,
So be it drouth or storm or flood, the broker's crops do well.
They are short of Katy Common, they are long on Zinc Preferred—
But the hired man on horseback is swimming with the herd.
White horns gleaming where the flood rolls brown,
Lefty fighting the lower point as the current sweeps them down,
Lefty fighting the stubborn steers that will not turn or slow;
They crowd beside him, they swim below him—"Come out, and let them go!"
But Lefty does not leave them and Lefty tries once more,
He is swinging the wild leaders in toward the northern shore;
"He'll do to ride the river with!" (Bridging the years between,
Men shall use those words again—and wonder what they mean.)
He is back to turn the stragglers in to follow the leaders through,
When a cottonwood snag comes twisting down and cuts the herd in two,
When a whirling snag comes twisting down, with long arms lashing hate,
On wearied horse and wearied man—and they see it come, too late!
A brown hand lifted in the splashing spray;
Sun upon a golden head that never will be gray;
A low mound bare until new grass is grown—
But the Palo Pinto trail herd has crossed the Cimarron!

A LITTLE midnight supper when the play is done,
Glancing lights and sparkling eyes—the night is just begun.
Beauteous night, O night of love—Youth and joy are met.
Shine on our enchantment still! "Sweet, your eyes are wet,"
"Dear, they sing for us alone!" Such the lover's creed—
But the hired man on horseback is off with the stampede!
There is no star in the pit-dark night, there is none to know or blame,
And a hundred yards to left or right, there is safety there—and shame!
A stone's throw out on either side, with none to guess or tell—
But the hired man on horseback has raised the rebel yell.
He has turned to loosen his saddle-strings, he has fumbled his slicker free,
He whirls it high and he snaps it wide wherever the foremost be,
He slaps it into a longhorn's eyes till he falters in his stride,
An oath and a shot, a laugh and a shot, and his wild mates race beside.

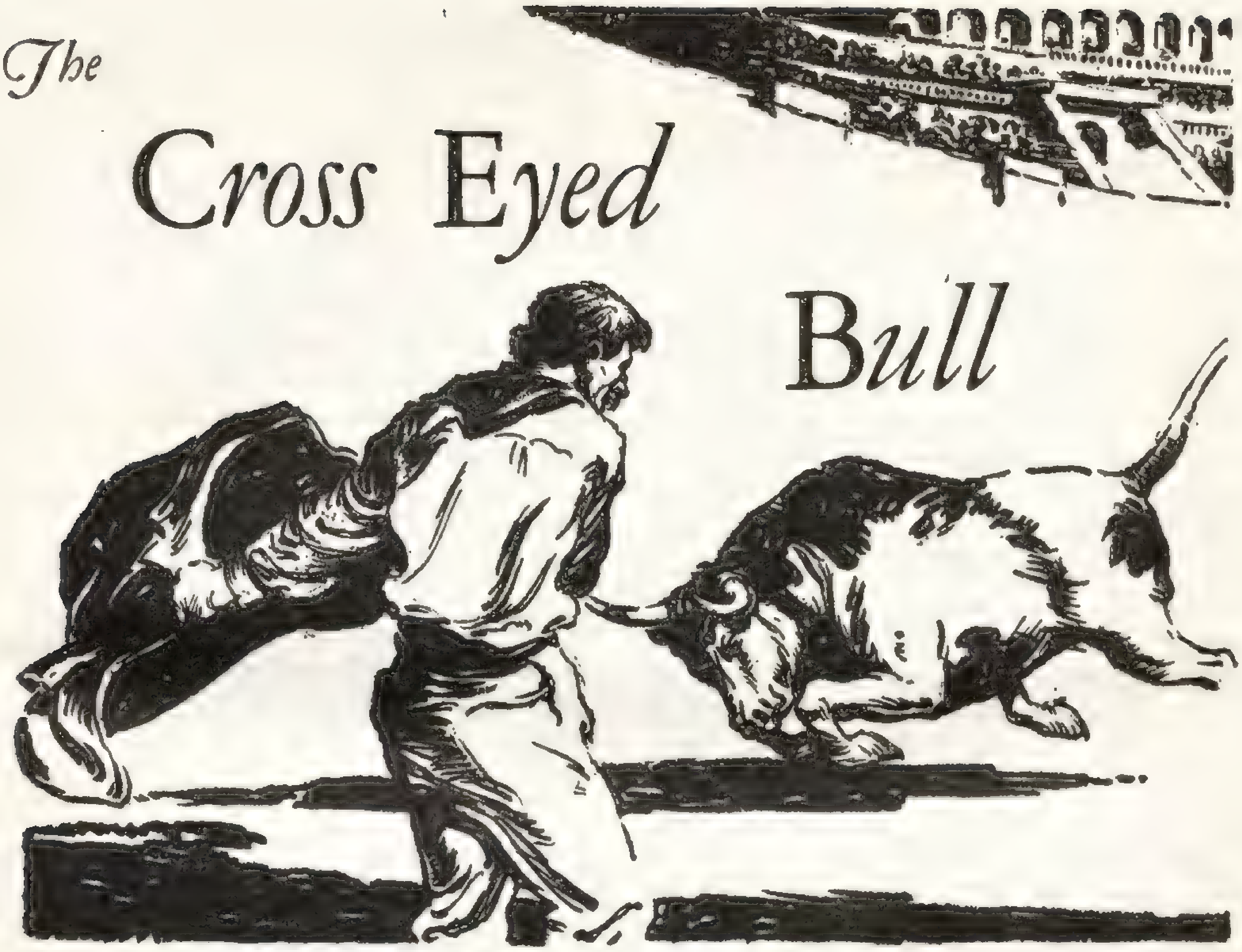
A pony stumbles—no, he is up, unhurt and running still;
"Turn 'em, turn 'em, turn 'em, Charlie! Good boy, Bill!"
They are crashing through the cedar mottes, they are skating a rim-rock slick,
They are thundering through the cactus flats where the badger holes are thick;
Day is breaking, clouds are lifting, leaders turned to mill—
"Hold 'em, cowboys! Turn 'em, Charlie!—*God! Where's Bill?*"



THE proud Young Intellectuals, a cultured folk are these,
They scorn the lowly Babbitts, and their hearts are overseas;
They turn their backs upon us, and if we ask them why,
They smile like jesting Pilate, and they stay for no reply.
They smile at faith and honor, and they smile at shame and crime—
But the old Palo Pinto man is calling for his time!
For he heard old voices and he heard hoofs beat,
Songs that long ago were gay to time with drumming feet;
Bent back straightens and dim eyes grow bright—
The last man on horseback rides on into the night.
Cossack and Saracen shout their wild welcome then,
Ragged proud Conquistadóres claim him kind and kin,
And the wild Beggars of the Sea leap up to swell the din;
And Hector leans upon the wall, and David bends to scan
This new brown comrade for the old brown clan—
The great hearted gentlemen who guard the outer wall,
Black with sin and stained with blood—and faithful through it all!
Still wearing for all ornament the scars they won below,
And the Lord God of Out-of-Doors, He cannot let them go!
They have halted the hired horseman beyond the outer gate,
But the gentlemen adventurers cry shame that he should wait;
And the sour saints soften, with a puzzled grin,
As Esau and Ishmael press to let their brother in.
Hat tip-tilted and his head held high,
Brave spurs jingling as he passes by,
Gray hair tousled and his lips a-quirk—
To the Master of the Workmen, with the tally of his work!



The Cross Eyed Bull



An enmity in the Colombian bullring

By ALAN LEMAY

AH, SEÑOR, it is true. I am hurt here, and here, and here. And Don Miguel, he is not hurt. He will fight bulls again in the arena and so, perhaps, gain for himself other shame. I am hurt and he is not. But he is shamed, and thus I have my revenge.

No, señor, it was not in this America del Sur, this Colombia, that I learned to fight the bull. It was in Castile where they know how such things are done. I am a *torero*, señor. And I have fought in Madrid. It is my regret that what has happened did not happen there. But it did not. And there is no help for that, my friend.

It was in Madrid, too, that I loved that beautiful one, that faithless one, possessed of the devil. Paquita was her name—I cross myself when I say it, for I am no fool. I know what is what and the work of the devil when I see it. But I did not know then. I loved her above all things. Above all things, that is, but one—the honor of the sanded ring. That I must keep for myself. Yes.

I loved her above all things, for she was beautiful, like the star of evening, like lotus blooms lying on the water in the night. And I, a *torero*, fighting well and loved by the people. But Miguel—ah, he was ever the wise beast! He knew well that I could tell a beautiful woman when I saw one. Yes, I was noted for that. So, through his patron he fixed it for himself. While I was yet singing under the window all was arranged.

You know, my friend, that in my country people know how things are correctly done. It is not the woman who decides whom she will marry. All is arranged. And that is right. So, while I sung in the street many nights Miguel had arranged all through his patron, who followed the ring of the bulls. And he married Paquita. He married her. A work of the devil. I cross myself.

I waited for my revenge. How should a *torero* let such a thing—what shall I say?—get by. Thank you. How should I let such a thing get by? I waited. But then no opportunity came. One year passed. Two. You think Spaniards cannot wait? That the blood is too hot? I waited. And two years passed. Then he was arrested. Miguel, the *torero*, he was arrested for treason. He had made himself into a plot, and was thrown into the grand jail. That was a great blow to me.

How was I to obtain the revenge, if Don Miguel died miserably in the jail? It could not be done. I bribed the guards. I myself scaled the walls. I ascended with a ladder of rope. I sawed out the bars of his cage. And I got him out of the grand jail with the ladder of rope, and so on to a ship. And thus Don Miguel and his wife came to this America of the South, to this Cartagena. And I too, waiting my chance.

IN THIS Colombia Don Miguel did not do so well. He had no money. I feared he would starve. Paquita, too, might have starved, though I cared nothing for that. Though I once loved her above all things, I loved her no more. Those things are of the moment. Let her starve, I thought. But Don Miguel—that was different. He must not starve. For I must save him for my revenge. So I fed them. With my own moneys I fed them both.

After a long time I got him started again in the fights. These Cartagena bull fightings are poor and few. The bulls are poor, the *toreros* worse. But I worked hard to get him started in the fights, such as they fought. He is a good *torero*, a good killer of bulls, though of course not such as I. Only few can fight like me—that goes without being said. But he did well. He was the favorite among these poor fighters of swine. And he did well.

Then it was that I almost starved. But I held together in different ways, though eating not often. And when he was without moneys I gave him what I had. For I had waited long and I could not let him starve to death on me now.

Then, today—ah, you saw it, señor! Today was the day for which I have waited so long! The glorious revenge!

TODAY there came into the ring what we call a cross eyed bull. I had waited for that! I was sitting in the box, waiting. Many times I have waited for him to meet that cross eyed bull. Many times there have been cross eyed bulls, but they did not fall to his lot. Today it came!

A cross eyed bull, señor, is one that does not pay attention to the flag that fools other bulls. He does not hit where he is supposed to look. He charges at the man, instead. And there is no getting away, for he is in truth not cross eyed at all, but only very wise, that beast!

When I saw Don Miguel was to fight a cross eyed bull I waited most anxiously. Even now my revenge might not—what shall I say?—come off. Thank you. Even now my revenge might not come off. Suppose the bull would catch him? Then all would be spoiled. But no. It was as I wished. Don Miguel is quick. Right over the barrier he dived and got away. And no one else would fight that bull.

The time had come! For this I had waited! My revenge was at hand. I stood up in my box, just as they were to take that bull away. I stood up, though I did not have on the correct clothes for fighting the bull. It is not correct to fight bulls in ordinary pants, but it could not be helped. I stood up and said:

"*Pararse!* Stop! I will fight that bull."

Everybody, all the thousands of people, they cheered.

I took my coat over my arm and leaped down into the bull ring. I walked to the center. I bowed as I have bowed so many times before. The people, they cheered many cheers. Paquita, also, was there. She had never seen my face, so she did not recognize me, perhaps. But what of that? Don Miguel had feared to fight this bull.

The bull, too, looked surprised. Bulls are not used to being fought in ordinary pants. And in any case, each bull is fought but one time. He was a gray bull, and poor. But cross eyed, as I say.

He stood there, that bull. I walked at him. I shouted and made faces. He did not move.

Then—ah, señor, then! I slapped his face with my coat! You saw it! Ah, the noble revenge! I slapped with the tails of my coat the face of the bull that Don Miguel would not fight. I insulted that bull that my enemy feared!

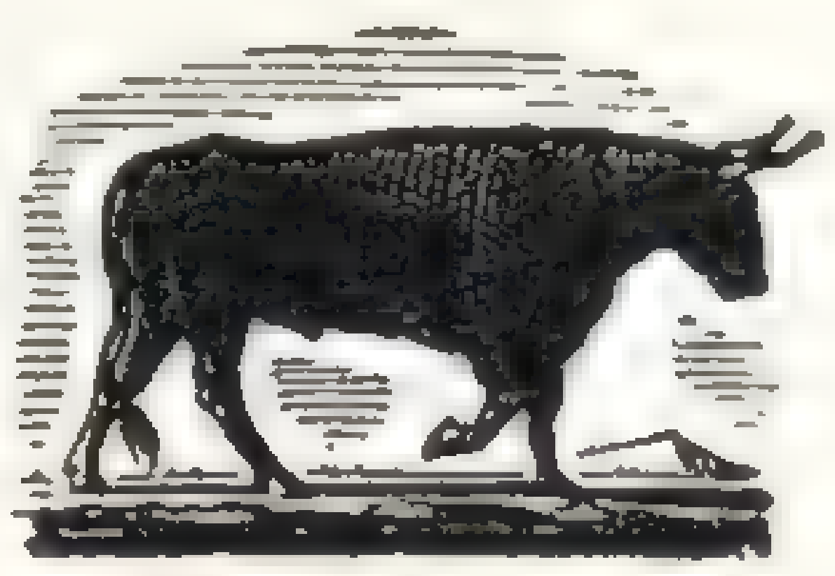
Don Miguel—he must have wept bitter tears of shame. Paquita, she must have hid her head! My revenge, the revenge I had planned for so long—it was complete. I could not see their shame, because of the flying dust, and the very many horns and hoofs. But I know that it was there. It could not but be there, their shame.

I insulted the bull. When with horses they had pulled that bull away so that I could be carried out I came to my senses and opened my eyes again. The very first thing I thought of when I came back to life was my revenge!

YES, SEÑOR. The revenge for which I got Miguel out of the grand jail, the revenge for which I fed him is now complete. I have fought the bull he feared! Yes. I am hurt here, and here, and here—all but killed by that bull. But Miguel—he is sunk in shame!

What, señor? You think maybe Miguel does not see it that way? Perhaps he does not realize that I am revenged at all? Do not say that, señor! My revenge, señor—I have waited long! He is miserable, he is in the depths of shame! I insist upon thinking that. Don Miguel is—what shall I say?—humiliated. Thank you.

He is humiliated. Yes.



The Bird of Prey

A stirring novelette of a French expatriate who tried to sweep the Orient clean of white men

By CHARLES GILSON

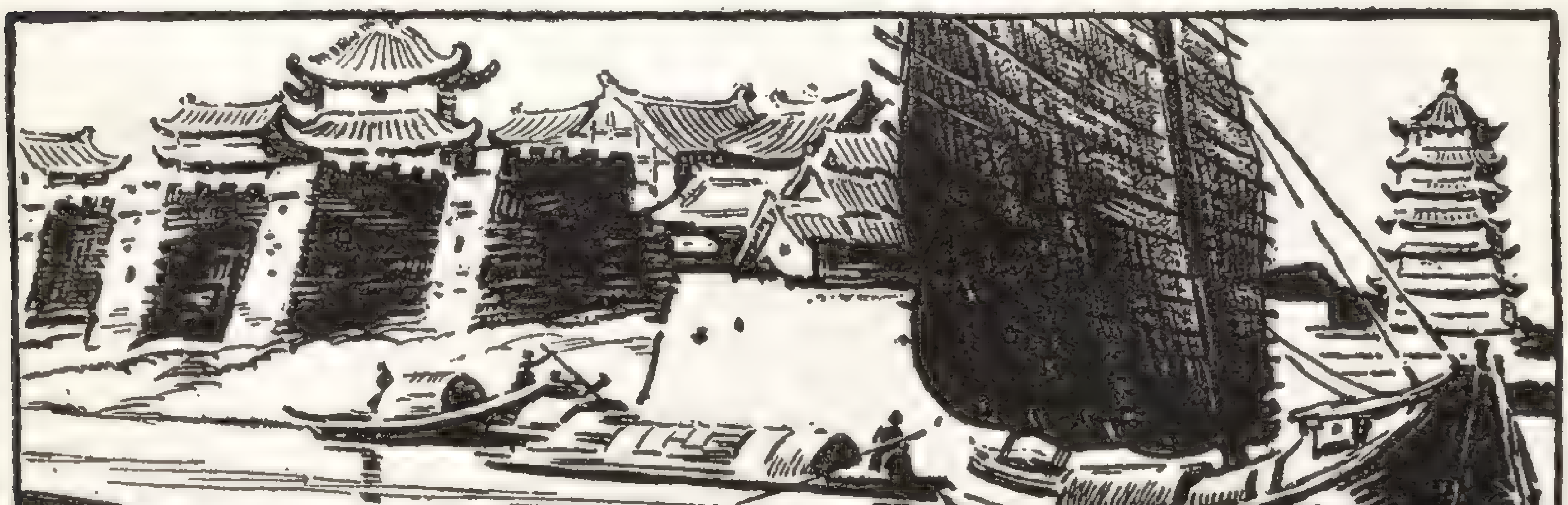
CHAPTER I

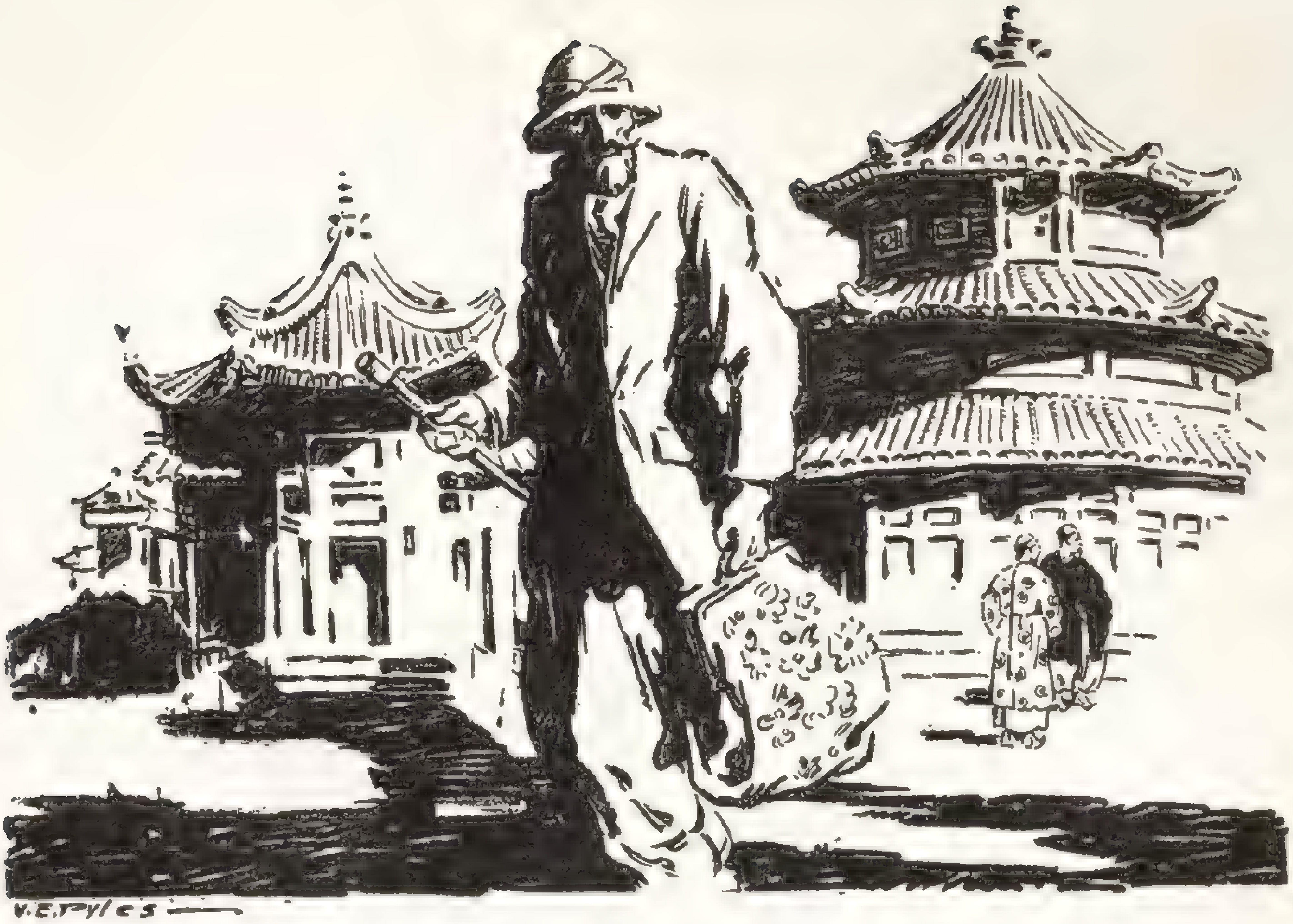
THE BIRD OF PREY.

NOT MANY years ago, there was a man come down to Singapore from Bangkok on a Japanese ship, the *Chugi-maru*, who went by the name of Pierre Vautour. That that was an assumed name was obvious, because it too exactly described his personal appearance, and because, also, he was the sort of man who would want to keep his business to himself.

He was a Frenchman, all right, though it was not until some years afterward that it was discovered that his real name was André Dumesnil—which is a good enough name in France, even if this particular member of the family was no credit to his ancestry.

He was the kind of man one naturally avoided, and it wouldn't be difficult to say why. He was fairly tall, very thin, and round of shoulder. He had a pale, sallow face that was not the color men usually go in the East, but "jail yellow," which is the complexion of one who has walked a prison yard. The waxlike, semitrans-





parency of his skin was accentuated by the extreme blackness of his hair and beard and especially by the most remarkable black eyes, that were snake's eyes—fearless, cruel, at once cold and passionate.

His black beard was like that of a *Sikh*, square shaped and growing outward from the middle. He had an extraordinary soft voice, a purring voice, low and yet distinct. He was an accomplished linguist. Many men in the East can speak two or three languages imperfectly; that is to say, they know enough of each to get along with. But this black bearded fellow who called himself Pierre Vautour could talk many languages with fluency, the natural ease of one who thinks in the words he uses. As well as French and English, he had Tamil, Malay and Chinese, both the Cantonese and the Mandarin dialects, and he also knew Javanese and Dutch.

His costume was peculiar, not to say eccentric. He wore trousers of Shantung silk, very baggy like a Chinaman's and creased; elastic sided boots and a white sun helmet that had once belonged to a

French colonial in Saigon. And then he had a black tailcoat—which is a thing that is seldom seen in those parts, where there is neither winter nor summer, but just the same even hothouse temperature from one year's end to another.

WHEN the *Chugi-maru* drew alongside the Nippon Yusen Kaisha wharf belonging to the Tanjong Paga Dock Company, and the gangway was lowered, Pierre Vautour walked ashore, carrying in his left hand a green carpetbag and in his right a black ebony walking stick with which he waved aside the clamoring rickshaw coolies who pestered him for a fare. From his costume and the circumstance that he refused to hire a rickshaw one might have supposed that he was a pauper, had it not been that the ebony walking stick was mounted in gold, and he wore upon the second finger of his right hand a diamond ring that he could have sold for five thousand China dollars.

Though it was the heat of the day, when a white man seldom walks a hundred yards unless he can't help it, this Frenchman went on foot into the native quarter of Rantau Panjang and then took the Bukit Timor Road from which he followed a jungle path to the house of a Kling, or native of India, who was called Kanapathy Pillai.

Now, this man—as his second name implies—was a high caste Tamil, which means that he was very little better than the rest of his breed. He chewed betel nut, smeared his long, coal black hair with oil and smelled vilely. The last job he had had was as foreman of a coolie gang on a rubber estate in Perak.

But he was never very long in one place, because he was a communist and worshipped a new god, called Lenin, whose name he couldn't even pronounce; and being a practical socialist and believing in the equal distribution of private property, every time he came down to Singapore from the mainland he brought with him some one else's wife.

The reason Kanapathy Pillai was able to maintain an establishment in Singapore was because he derived half his income from the women he seduced and the other half from an Eurasian labor delegate with a mandate from Moscow. One after the other, the various rubber companies—British, American and Japanese—had thought it best to get rid of him. Wherever he went there was trouble.

Now the white man who will live with a Tamil has lost something more than caste. He has lost all sense of decency as well as his sense of smell. And yet, Vautour remained with Kanapathy Pillai out in the jungle by Tanglin for more than a week. Then, in company of three Malays, and still carrying his green carpetbag, he walked all the way to the Tambroh Channel, across which the bridge had just been built.

And here, in the moonlight, at a certain place where *nipa* and *ijok* palms were overtopped at the water's edge by great *tapangs*, he found a *praya* awaiting him, in which he set sail up the west coast, past Penang, to the Sultanate of Turak.

Turak is an independent state of little importance, consisting of a few thousand acres of virgin jungle, mismanaged rubber estates overrun with *lalang*, and pineapple plantations. There is no building of any importance in the whole country except the sultan's palace, which is furnished in the western fashion and the worst possible taste, and the ramshackle attap thatched bungalows that are called the barracks, in which his Highness accommodates an army of about two hundred and fifty ragged cutthroats.

Sultan Sleeman of Turak had at that time been generously accorded by the British government a rope with which to hang himself. Having enjoyed the benefits of a Western education, and aping, in everything but morals, the civilisation that he professed to despise, he never made any secret of his intention of keeping all white men—merchants, traders and planters—out of Turak.

Now, Pierre Vautour was a white man—or ought to have been. And yet he was not only personally received at Turak Bahru by the commander in chief of the two hundred and fifty, but he was conducted forthwith, and with the deference due to an ambassador, to the sultan's palace, where he remained for a fortnight the honoured guest of his Highness, Sleeman bin Kassim.

That in itself is enough to show that Vautour was a strange man, a cosmopolitan and superior to class distinctions; for he had been received with open arms in turn by a Tamil coolie and a Malay prince; and in both palace and hovel he was equally at home.

KANAPATHY PILLAI resembled the sultan in nothing but his Oriental susceptibilities to the charms of the opposite sex. Only in this respect the Sultan had a certain advantage over the coolie; for as well as containing a pianola and a billiard table, his palace at Turak Bharu was the lodging of a veritable bevy of brides, hailing from Indo-China, Burma, Siam and Java, as well as from various parts of the Malay Peninsula itself.

This was all in accordance with his Highness's rights, prerogative and revenue. Neither his income nor his religion prohibited him from pleasing himself; and the only noteworthy circumstance about his matrimonial affairs—if they may be designated that—was that, among these Asiatic beauties, at the time when Vautour came to Turak, there was a certain damsel who called herself Talamera.

That was a made up name, too. But then, she was the sort of person who never had a name, for nobody knew exactly who she was. As she had come up from the Philippines when little more than a child and could speak a few words of Spanish, it is safe to suppose that her father was a Spaniard, which was likely enough from her appearance.

What the rest of her was was doubtful. There was neither Chinese nor Malay in her, at any rate. She had the sleepy, sensuous eyes of India, as soft and as profoundly calm as a breathless tropic night—very different eyes from those of the wideawake, calculating Mongol, in which there is cruelty, alertness and humor.

And her figure, too, made it probable that the Asiatic part of her was of Aryan stock, though her mother may have belonged to Samoa or Hawaii. She was slender and tall, and walked with a certain sinuous, slothful grace, as if it were too much trouble to move.

It is easy enough for a halfcaste to be beautiful, but Talamera was something more than that. She looked to be always dreaming, pleasantly dreaming, as if the world didn't matter, because there was something exquisite and precious within herself that must remain a mystery to common people. She had a look of drowsy happiness that was fatal to men and a smile of almost childish innocence, even after she had left Turak Bharu once and for all. Which speaks volumes for her power of detaching herself from her environment.

For the sultan tired of her soon enough, as he was bound to do. His women were never much more to him than his gramaphones, for which he was always buying new records. But Talamera must have been at the palace when Vautour was there; and for aught we know, he might have gone to Turak as much to meet the girl as to see the sultan himself.

Anyway, this strange Frenchman left that part of the world some weeks later and went up the China coast from Penang. He traveled on a Messageries Maritimes boat—still with his green carpet bag and his ebony walking stick—as far as Hong Kong, where he spent more than a month. Then he suddenly turned up in Shanghai, where he was entertained in the *yamen* of Li-tsao-yen, who was then the military governor of Hu-chau and one of the richest men in China.

Vautour was better dressed and more prosperous looking, as well as a little fatter—though he was still a thin man—when he returned to the Malay States. He took a room in Raffles Hotel, where he was an object of extreme interest to globe trotters and of some suspicion to the management. It was noticed that he drank only champagne at meals, though never more than a glass and a half at a time.

He never smoked, and appeared to have no definite occupation beyond reading the newspapers.

And more than once there came to the hotel an Eurasian broker whose reputation was none of the best. He called himself Mr. de Sousa-Fink—very particular about both his personal appearance and the hyphen in his surname. They were often to be seen together—Vautour talking with great earnestness in his soft, musical voice; the other listening, stroking his plastered greasy hair. A strange couple: a black and white dude who could look no one straight in the face and a man who was like a human bird of prey—gaunt, ravenous, rapacious.

And whilst Vautour was in Singapore, who should come down from Turak but Sultan Sleeman himself who, no doubt by arrangement, brought Talamera with him?

THE THREE dined together in the hotel dining room, the sultan drinking heavily and laughing much. He wore a soft silk shirt, with a neatly tied black tie and a well cut evening suit and looked quite a respectable member of society, in spite of the fat crease at the back of his neck and his gold front teeth. As for Talamera, she had a Paris gown that showed off her figure to perfection, and an Indian veil thrown over her head gave her an air of additional enchantment. Vautour—who sat between them as host—looked more incongruous than ever, with his black tailcoat and white Chinese trousers. A kind of horrible pantaloon. People laughed at him and every one who entered the room stared at him until they saw Talamera, when they had no eyes for any one else.

And all that meal, though Vautour talked only to the sultan, he never ceased to look at the girl. His black eyes were fixed upon her steadfastly, dominantly, with something terrible in them. And she just looked back at him and sometimes smiled sleepily, never seeming to care the straw through which she sipped a soft iced drink with slices of pineapple in it for Sultan Sleeman bin Kassim, or any one else but this mysterious, black bearded Frenchman.

Nor did the sultan appear to mind. Like the girl, he had no interest in anything but Pierre Vautour. Talamera might have been drugged. She looked without fear, even enthralled, into those black, hungry eyes that seemed to affect her like an anesthetic.

She belonged to Vautour—what there was of heart and soul in Talamera—from that very moment. She knew it; and so did he; and Sleeman knew that it was worth his while to part with her. As a matter of fact, he didn't mind doing that in the least, since, his thoughts running upon a certain tight rope walker in a traveling circus, he had by then got an idea in his head that there was no woman in the world but a white one; and Talamera had never pretended to be that.

So when Vautour again went up the coast to Shanghai he took with him Talamera, as well as his green carpetbag and his ebony walking stick. And that was the beginning of things. Vautour had woven a net, and within the meshes of that net he was content to bide his time.

CHAPTER II

BATU LUNGA

THE TANJONG PAGA docks again; only this time instead of Pierre Vautour with his black beard and his green carpetbag, a certain John Currie, rubber planter, leaning on the rails of the small *Island* steamship that had brought him up from Sydney, and swearing fluently under his breath, as only a planter can.

A man who has been deprived of his well earned leave and who, moreover, has had eleven years of the Malay jungle, is apt to be short in the temper. The more credit would have been due to Job if he hadn't been an Asiatic and used to the climate. John Currie had had eleven years of sweltering days and sleepless nights, and seven days a week of it, in a country where in course of time a man must lose everything he once possessed—health, conscience, hope, religion, everything except his thirst. And thank God for that!

As the ship drew alongside the wharf a large canary colored Rolls-Royce with a white man as chauffeur and an aluminum bonnet drew up in the shade of a group of coconut palms, and a fat, middle aged native of India got out and elbowed his way through the polyglot crowd on the waterfront.

Currie ceased swearing and smiled. The fact that Olsen had sent old Michaelmas down to Singapore in his car proved that he had got the wind up properly. When the Indian caught sight of Currie he held up a hand in salutation—the greeting of a Roman emperor.

"Sir, welcome!" he shouted. "My jolly gosh, Mr. Currie, you're wanted quick at Batu Lunga! There's trouble there."

Currie knew that already. The telegram he had received at Sydney had told him that much:

RETURN AT ONCE. URGENT. —OLSEN.

That was what came of knowing your job. So far he had somehow managed to hold the estate together, but he had known for a long time that he couldn't go on doing it forever.

Of course there had been trouble the moment his back was turned; and he wouldn't mind betting that that ranting maniac, Kanapathy Pillai, was at the back of it. Olsen was too fond of his own comfort to go within a hundred of miles of Batu Lunga, except when he had to; and Elliot, who had been left in charge, had been bound to put his foot in it. In fact, the only capable fellow in the whole show was the senior field conductor, Michaelmas, with his fat stomach, his gold rimmed spectacles and his inflated idea of his own importance.

Not only could Michaelmas always be relied upon; he was a joy forever, the one redeeming feature of life in the jungle at Batu Lunga. The old fellow's abject scorn for those whom he was pleased to call black men—though he himself was as black as any—his bombastic utterances and his way of holding up his right hand, as if his announcements were prophetic; all these with his string of historic Christian names were something to remember.

A Telegu by birth, Michaelmas had been educated in Madras, and called himself a Christian. He was representative in a way of the renaissance of modern India. With a genius for mental arithmetic, he was better read and a far better business man than the average European; and yet he had a sincere respect and admiration for the white race, begotten of tradition, his powers of observation and, incidentally, a due consideration of his own personal interests.

In proof of his loyalty, he had christened himself after the heroes of the Empire and invariably signed his full name on official returns and the chits with which he bombarded Currie.

> SIR—(he had once written) Having some grievance against her husband, a talkative dog with a black face desires to see you. Shall I send her to your honoured self or to the devil?
>
> Your Obedient servant, awaiting instructions,
> —CLIVE HASTINGS HAVELOCK MICHAELMAS.

As soon as his luggage had been brought ashore Currie entered the car, followed by the Telegu. The planter produced a Borneo cheroot and smoked in silence, while he listened to his companion's tale of woe and they were whirled through the dust of the squalid native quarter.

Things appeared to be just about as bad as they could be. Elliot had gone on the drink—and he never had been able to tell when he had had a stinger over the odd. According to Michaelmas he had thrashed a Tamil in broad daylight in front of a crowd of witnesses, with the result that several coolies had gone over to the Japanese estate across the river and the rest were on strike.

"Sir, a grave situation!" Michaelmas exclaimed. "A kettle of fish, by golly!"

By then the car was purring softly along the straight road through the jungle that leads over the Tambroh Bridge to the mainland. They could not expect to reach their destination until after dark.

Currie cursed his luck. It looked as if all the work he had done and the patience he had shown were wasted. And he hadn't been away long enough to get the taste of quinine out of his mouth. Then he looked at Michaelmas and laughed outright.

The old Telegu, who was perspiring profusely, was an unhealthy leaden color about the gills. It was evident that he was frightened out of his life. He looked blacker than he really was, by reason of his white duck clothes, the coat of which was very much creased in front, the buttons sticking out like a line of parasitic limpets, while his trousers were far too tight for comfort.

IN THE ordinary course of events Currie would have stopped at the Johore Hotel for a stinger, as he would certainly have looked in at Ikey's Bar in Singapore, to meet old friends and swap jokes. But, if all Michaelmas had said were true, there was no time to waste.

Batu Lunga lies in a valley between the hills and the Indau River in the northeast of Johore, as much off the map as any rubber estate in the whole peninsula. It was the brief twilight of the tropics, and the flying foxes were on the wing, when the car crossed the watershed, and John Currie got the shock of his life.

Jumping to his feet, he leaned forward and shouted in the chauffeur's ear.

"Put your foot down, Watts, for God's sake, and let her rip!" he cried. "The darned place is on fire!"

Michaelmas did not move. He sat puffing like a grampus, his eyes bulbous and staring, his blue lips parted.

From the point they had reached they could look down upon something like twenty-five square miles of jungle, in the half dark and the rising mist, like a vast green carpet in which there were lighter, irregular patches where the trees had been cleared for plantations. And there, where Batu Lunga lay, was a red glow in the haze that could have only one meaning.

Currie spoke to Michaelmas:

"This looks like the end of my job and yours," said he. "They've set fire to the factory! That means mutiny, Mick. That's what it comes to! Those drying sheds'll burn like matchwood. Thousands of dollars' worth of rubber gone west. If Olsen's there he'll be pretty near off his head."

Twenty minutes later the car drew up outside Olsen's bungalow, which was not a hundred yards from the blazing factory. The manager himself was standing there with an automatic pistol in one hand, looking limp and helpless like a mourner at a graveside and doing nothing, because there was nothing to do.

When he saw Currie he turned and spoke almost without emotion.

"Too late!" said he, with a jerk of the head toward the fire. "But I doubt if even you could have stopped it, John. They've gone mad, the whole crew of them!"

"What about insurance?" Currie asked.

"Won't cover half of it! We were packed up with rubber, and we've been cutting everything for dividends. This will break me."

"We'll pull around again, in time," said Currie doubtfully. "I suppose Kanapathy Pillai put them up to it?"

"Yes," said Olsen, "and gin. The labor delegate cleared off a few days ago, which meant that he knew they were getting out of hand, and didn't want the responsibility. They worked themselves up on gin; and we can't stop them buying it. They're free to buy what they like nowadays."

"Where have they all got to?" Currie asked.

"In the compound. It's pandemonium. The fellows who cleared off stole half the goats belonging to the others, and that made them madder than ever."

Currie stood thinking a moment.

"I'm going up there," he said deliberately. "I'm going to have it out with Kanapathy in front of the lot of them."

"You'll be a dead man if you do!" said the other quickly.

"I can't help that, Olsen. If they're not brought to heel tonight it will be the end of this estate. You know that as well as I do. They're top dogs now; and if we let Tamils see we're frightened of them, the white man might as well get out of this country once and for all."

"But they'll kill you, man!" Olsen persisted.

"They may and they may not," said Currie quietly. "If you went to them, I tell you straight, I wouldn't give a rotten banana skin for your life. I don't say I can, but I may be able to handle them. Lend me that gun of yours—in case of accidents."

Olsen handed over his pistol, and turned away with a shrug; whilst John Currie slowly climbed the hill to the native quarters.

HE WALKED with lowered head, as if preoccupied with his thoughts, as if he neither knew or cared what he was doing.

At the end of the compound he came upon a group of long haired, frightened women. One of these shrieked when she saw him and took to her heels, dragging after her a squalling, naked child.

Though the fire had burned down somewhat it was almost as light as day. The great tapang trees in the surrounding jungle were golden leaved—a scene in fairyland, with the foul stink of burning crude rubber, and a crowd of black maniacs, half of whom were drunk. Currie walked straight into the middle of them. He was a bit of an actor in his way. Whatever he may have felt, he looked half surprised and half disgusted, which was the impression he wanted to give.

They were too surprised at seeing him to say anything at first; and then, as is usually the case with natives, they all began talking at once.

A wild looking fellow at the best of times, with a jungle look about him, the Tamil coolie is not exactly improved when he has worked himself up to fever pitch on trade gin. Many carried heavy sticks and nearly all had knives. There were threats and insults and then a stone flew over the planter's shoulder dangerously near his face.

Currie took no notice of it beyond laughing and telling the man who had thrown it that he was a fool. He reminded them that he had done them more than one good turn in the past. He had got them better rations; he had settled their disputes, their endless arguments about their women and goats. He had once carried a sick woman, whom he had found dying in the jungle, six miles to the doctor. Drunk though they were, they remembered that.

They had always liked John Currie. He was the one white man on the estate who would never stand any nonsense. And they got no more than they expected when he abused them roundly in a string of swear words in their own language. He asked them how they thought they were going to live when there was no work for them to do. Kanapathy Pillai was the man he wanted. He wasn't as a rule slow to come forward when there was any talking to be done.

A few were already shamefaced, though most were still truculent. Currie got his information out of an old man who was all for peace, who knew something of the white man's law and feared for the consequences of what had been already done.

Kanapathy Pillai wasn't there. He was down by the river in the bamboo temple they had made in the jungle, where he was praying to Durgâ, the goddess of all things.

Currie had nothing more to say to that. He just turned his back on them and walked away, expecting at any moment a knife in the back.

But they let him go, though many followed at a safe distance, whispering and nodding. Kanapathy had said that Durgâ had decreed that they should rise up against the white man's rule. Kanapathy Pillai was a scholar who had read the sacred books, who had the power to see visions and commune with the gods.

Currie took the road down the hill that led into the jungle. It was darker away from the fire, and darker still among the trees from which the undergrowth had been cleared by Chinese labor three months ago.

He wished he had never had to manage any coolies but Chinese. It was easy enough to get along with Sinkies: good tempered fellows, hard workers, and never any complaints. Tamils were jungle folk, just like children; you never knew where you were with them.

A narrow path plunged him into the blackness of a cellar. A roof of interlacing branches over his head, walls of impenetrable thickets on either side of him and a network of rattans extending from one to the other. He could see nothing but an occasional patch of moonlight on the path wherever there was a gap in the foliage and where sometimes a flowering orchid showed vaguely, like the little, evil face of a watching gnome.

CURRIE was sweating in the heat. He had walked briskly, and there was no air to breathe in this black hothouse. Once or twice he stopped to listen, to discover that the coolies from the compound were no longer following him, though he could hear the monkeys they had frightened moving among the trees, chattering, panic stricken, fussy as Tamils themselves.

A glow appeared in front of him, red in the darkness. A vampire bat, velvet winged, glided past him. A fit place for vampires—but Currie had had eleven years of it and there was neither romance nor mystery in the jungle for him. It was just a place where one sweated and worked and got fever and battled with *lalang* and Tamil monkey men.

In a clearing by the riverside the coolies had erected a shrine to the great goddess Durgâ to whom they had made sacrifice of the white man's wealth begotten of their own sweat and toil. It was no more than a half open shed, bamboos supporting an attap roof. And they had paid an image maker to make them an idol, a hideous thing on a bamboo frame, constructed of straw and clay, and painted. She had hair, and jewelry of talc and mica, and in her hands were tin weapons.

Thick smoke from the fire that burned before the image clung beneath the roof of the temple in the humid, heavy atmosphere; and it was this that made it difficult for Currie to see exactly what was taking place. No more than ten men were there, all of them high caste Tamils, prostrating themselves before the image that was half hidden in the smoke. Durgâ had condescended to leave her beloved Siva to descend to earth, animating for the time being this idol of painted clay and straw.

They sought, no doubt, some justification for what they had done; refuge in the shrine of the Hindu goddess from the vengeance of the Christian God. John Currie knew that it was more than his life was worth to interfere with them now. He stood a little way apart, half hidden by the jungle undergrowth, waiting for the time when the image would be cast into the river.

Then he might talk to Kanapathy Pillai as one man to another, telling him that this was no question between Christ and Durgâ, between the white man and the black, but a deliberate breach of the law, for which some one must be answerable to the district officer.

The prostrate figures before the shrine mumbled and groaned their prayers, until at a given signal a man began to beat a tomtom. And at that the others rose to their feet, went to the image and carried it shoulder high to the river bank.

Currie could see them silhouetted against the moonlight on the water. Durgâ to the heavens, and that monstrosity of painted mud on a bamboo frame to the crocodiles! Kanapathy Pillai led the way to the river, the others following, singing loudly to the beating of the tomtom.

The planter turned his eyes again to the temple that he had expected to find empty. But, there, behind the place where the image had stood, a man was seated cross legged on the ground, a man who was no Tamil, but a white man. He was a strange looking man, for he wore white trousers like a Chinese and a black tailcoat. He had a beard, too, and he sat there motionless, looking almost as inanimate as the idol itself had been.

He had a white face that, even in the red glow of the charcoal fire, looked like a death mask.

CHAPTER III

A SACRIFICE TO DURGÂ

JOHN CURRIE stepped forward. Though his hands were in his pockets he held the butt of his automatic.

"Who the devil are you?" he asked.

The black bearded man looked up slowly, his waxen features showing little or no surprise. He answered in perfect English, too correct to be his mother tongue, every syllable pronounced with distinct, exaggerated accuracy.

"My name is Constant Gerard," said he, "and as that implies, I am French. To whom have I the honor to make myself known?"

"I'm a planter," said Currie, "and these coolies are my men. What are you doing here?"

The Frenchman threw out his hands, the first evidence of his Gallic origin, though his voice was still low and under perfect control.

"Is it not permitted?" he asked, lifting his black eyebrows. "I apologize, monsieur, if I trespass. I did not know."

Currie was becoming impatient. The Tamils were still singing. He could hear the shrill voice of Kanapathy Pillai, commiting the empty husk, in which the soul of the divinity had found a temporary earthly shelter, to the black, turbid water of the river.

"You can give a plain answer to a plain question, I suppose," said he impatiently. "Are you responsible for having supplied these greasy lunatics with gin?"

The man who had said his name was Gerard shrugged his shoulders.

"Gin!" he exclaimed. "Why? Why should I?"

"Because they've swallowed more of that stuff within the last twenty-four hours than they were ever able to pay for themselves. I never before heard of a white man slinking about the jungle after dark, twenty miles from anywhere. What have Hindu religious rites to do with you?"

The Frenchman was still apologetic.

"For science, monsieur," said he, "there are some of us who willingly endure hardships and discomforts, who would even risk our lives, I assure you, for science. It is my pleasure to study native life. Why not?"

Currie grunted.

"Even if that's true," said he, "I want to know how you got here?"

The other laughed. There was no visible expression of humor on his face. His laughter was no more than the momentary manifestation of two rows of white, gleaming teeth.

"You ask me more than I can say," said he. "I do not even know where I am."

"You must have known there was trouble at Batu Lunga, that they're all drunk on gin and they've burnt the place to cinders?"

"Monsieur, these things do not interest me very much. I have, as you say, other fish to fry."

Currie was suddenly aware of eyes on every side of him—red eyes that in the firelight were like those of wild cats. Kanapathy and the man who had been with him had returned from the river bank.

No one spoke; they remained silent, motionless. A few, among whom was Kanapathy Pillai himself, had ventured to cross the threshold. The others stood on all four sides of the rickety little building that looked as if it would collapse at the first gust of wind; their lean hungry faces thrust into the gaps between the bamboo uprights under the attap roof.

For the first time that evening John Currie was afraid. He felt himself to be trapped. He knew the natural excitability of the Tamil; and he knew, too, that jungle blood and gin precipitated frenzy.

THIS silence was ominous because it was unnatural. It was evident that they waited for something—a word, a signal, a sudden turn in events. And if that were so they could be waiting only upon the pleasure of that black bearded sphinx, seated cross legged on the ground.

It was he who spoke in the same quiet voice, expressionless, a bloodless monotone. Only this time he spoke in Tamil, and not to Currie, but to the watching eyes that were everywhere.

"Who is this white man?" he demanded. "If he should doubt my honesty, you, my brothers, will bear witness for me. If there be trouble between you, why should I not act as mediator, I who have worshipped with you at your shrine?"

Though he had not spoken to the planter, it was Currie who answered hotly.

"I'll have no third party in this affair," said he. "I've come for an explanation of what's happened from my own men and I'm going to have it. I've lived in this flaming country long enough to know something about it. We don't stand for running a rubber estate on gin and communism. Even in a fever trap like this there are magistrates and police. A crowd of drunken coolies can't commit arson with impunity. You may take my word for it, sooner or later full inquiries will be made."

The Frenchman shook his head. As he rose slowly to his feet he picked up from the ground an ebony walking stick.

"Pardon me, monsieur," he said. "Such inquiries will not affect yourself."

"How's that?" asked Currie. "What the hell do you know about it?"

The men upon the threshold had moved forward a little. They stood in tense attitudes, their knives ready. Yet there was irresolution in the way their fierce eyes shifted quickly from one white man to the other.

Currie whipped out his automatic. There was not a wall in the place against which he could safely plant his back. Whichever way he faced he might be knifed at any moment from behind. He saw that he was in a tight place and remembered Olsen's words, "You won't come back alive."

"I'll shoot stone dead the first man who moves an inch!" he shouted in Tamil.

The Frenchman laughed again, just a flash of white teeth in the blackness of his beard.

"And put yourself in the wrong?" he asked.

"In self defense," said Currie.

The stranger lifted his ebony walking stick and pointed it straight at Kanapathy Pillai.

"Put away your knives," said he. "I would not have my brothers act like madmen. And besides, though the soul of the goddess is departed, surely this is yet a sacred place, sacred to Durgâ? Upon myself I take the responsibility for what may happen. How better could I prove that I am your brother? As for you, monsieur," he added, turning again to Currie, "you would be well advised to do nothing rash."

In an admonitory manner he tapped the planter upon the chest with the ferrule of his ebony walking stick. There was something in the personality of the man that compelled attention, as there was also a quality in his soft and pleasantly musical voice that allayed suspicion.

Using words that counseled moderation, he pressed a button in the gold mounting of his walking stick with the flat of his thumb—a button that, within the stick itself, released a powerful spring. And a sharp pointed steel stiletto, thin as a knitting needle, shot out from the ferrule—to bury itself to its full extent in John Currie's left breast.

The planter sank to the ground, with no more than a groan that was half a sob, as if his knees had suddenly given way beneath him. The Frenchman snatched the stick back with a jerk to save the slender blade from breaking. For a moment he stood over the fallen man, with his white teeth showing in the firelight, looking down upon what he had done.

Even such a deed as this did not seem to have moved him. If anything, he was curious, but not vitally interested to know whether his victim was dead or alive. He was neither angry nor apprehensive. A man without blood in his veins, whose vitality emanated, as it seemed, from the slow fire that burned in his eyes.

THE ROOM was crowded now with natives too frightened to speak. The gin had gone out of them. They had forgotten even Durgâ, the goddess of all things. For the first time the Frenchman spoke quickly, not breathless with suspense, but merely because he had much to say and little time in which to say it.

"Into the river with him, dead or alive!" he jerked out. "The crocodiles will leave no trace of him. As for you people, you have nothing to be frightened about. Not a man here knows anything of what's happened, and there's not a shred of evidence against any one of you. This is the one man I wanted; and I never thought I would have the luck to get him. Kanapathy Pillai, I leave the rest to you."

And with that he was gone, out of the hut, with his ebony walking stick tucked under an arm.

He walked rapidly with long strides, an awkward gait, with his knees bent and stooping shoulders. He followed a jungle path that led along the river bank toward the north; and it was not until he was well beyond the boundary line of the Batu Linga estate that he struck a road—a straight, narrow road of red gravel, recently made across the peninsula from east to west.

He knew what he was looking for, or he could never have found it in the darkness of the jungle. Upon a hilltop, about a quarter of a mile along the road, a six cylinder Buick had been brought to rest under the feathery branches of some low growing palm trees by the side of a pineapple plantation. All the lights had been switched off. The car stood upon a steep downward grade, held stationary by her brakes. On the appearance of the Frenchman, of whom nothing was visible in the semi-darkness but his white Chinese trousers, a man emerged from the shadows.

"It is you, Tuan?" he asked.

He was a Malay. He had spoken in Malay, and he wore the livery of his Highness, the Sultan of Turak.

The Frenchman got into the car without haste.

"Back to the palace!" he ordered. "And start the engine as I told you. That done, my friend, there is no haste. The night is beautiful."

He lay back upon the upholstery of the seat, his thin, folded hands resting on the handle of his ebony walking stick.

The Malay chauffeur, without starting the engine, released the brakes, with the result that the car began to coast down the hill slowly at first, but rapidly gaining impetus. Alongside the pineapple plantation the roadway was in the moonlight; but, a little further on where it dived into the jungle, the man was obliged to switch on the headlights.

By then they were at the foot of the hill. She was already in top gear; and as the driver slowly let in the clutch, the engine picked up her revolutions in comparative silence. Upon a clear road averaging over forty miles an hour the car cleared the central watershed of the peninsula and, in the small hours of morning, crossed the frontier of the independent petty state of Turak.

AND IN the meantime ten frightened men stood shivering, talking in breathless whispers, in the place where they had prayed but a few minutes before to Durgâ, the goddess of all things, to avenge what they were pleased to think their wrongs.

Even Kanapathy Pillai was afraid. This was more than he had ever bargained for when he had talked of a workers' Soviet of the East. There was blood on the planter's white coat, over the heart; blood, too, had run from his mouth to the corners of his chin, and not one of them had the courage to make sure that he was dead.

They had their orders to cast him to the crocodiles, whither had gone the empty husk that for a time had been animated by the divine spirit of the wife of Siva. But in cold blood they dared not send after the holy goddess the soul of a human being who would bear witness of their guilt.

It was useless for them to protest that they themselves were innocent. If they hushed up this thing they were a party to the crime. On the other hand, they could not report truthfully what had happened, without convicting themselves of a serious offense. They had been prepared to swear on oath that the factory had caught fire by chance. They could not give evidence against the black bearded man, who spoke their language and had read their sacred books, without betraying themselves.

He had come to them, this man of mystery, from somewhere out of the jungle. He had told them exactly what they were to do. He had cursed his own people, the white race, of whatever nationality or creed. He had plotted and planned, showing them how they could avenge themselves upon their masters; and in order that their courage might not fail them at the eleventh hour, he had brought them many cases of cheap gin—the drink upon which they were ever ready to spend their hard earned dollars. But they had never thought that it would end like this.

Compassion had no great part in their sentiments. They were just alarmed by what they had seen and done. Incapable at the best of times of making up their minds, even in the most trifling disputes, they were now divided in their opinions as to what they should do.

Kanapathy Pillai was for carrying out their orders to the letter. One or two others had a superstitious idea that, if they touched the body of the dead man, they would convict themselves. They had an exaggerated notion of the capabilities of the Malay police, the omniscience of the district officer.

Talk of the police frightened them more than ever. One man crept out into the jungle and listened, to come back almost at once, shaking in every limb. Like most Tamils, he was nothing much more than skin and bone; and, when he tried to speak, with his teeth chattering, his knees smote one against the other. In a breathless voice he told them that the police were already there.

The effect of this startling intelligence was petrifying. Terrified already, they were now speechless. They had not the ability to reason; they had not the courage to think. They went out from the temple on tiptoe and could see a light approaching along the jungle path that led from the compound. Time and again this light vanished behind the trunks of trees. It was the bright ray of an electric torch that was waved here and there, up and down among the undergrowth, to left and right.

They scattered in all directions, silently slinking away into the shadows, fit companions for the vampire bats.

THE LIGHT came on, moving forward in jerks, as if the man who carried it stopped repeatedly. Indeed, it took him two or three minutes to cover a distance of less than fifty yards, to reach the clearing by the river where he switched off the torch.

The Tamils had gone; he did not know that. With faltering footsteps and breathing heavily, he approached the temple, the bamboo shrine wherein the fire still burned upon the ground.

And the startled face that looked in at the doorway was the face of Clive Hastings Havelock Michaelmas. The ordeal through which he had passed, journeying alone more than a mile along a jungle path in the dark, had been more than his nerves could stand. His hands were shaking, his eyes wide and staring and his tongue hung from his mouth like that of a thirsty dog. And like a dog, too, he panted, his breath coming in short, sudden gasps.

Michaelmas had braved the terrors of the jungle, that he thought to be teeming with tigers and poisonous snakes, and the vengeance of drunken Tamil coolies, whom he had often called dirty black men to their faces, for love of the man who was his master. And there John Currie lay upon the ground in the firelight, with the blood upon the breast pocket of his white coat and the blood upon his lips, his features like alabaster.

Michaelmas in an instant was down upon his knees. Listening, he could hear no heart beat, because his own heart was thumping like an engine. It was enough for him, however, that the body was not cold.

With great difficulty he lifted the unconscious man upon his shoulders and began to carry him along the jungle-path toward Batu Lunga—the consummation of the one great heroic action in the life of a Telegu clerk.

CHAPTER IV

MR. LI

SIX WEEKS in the Singapore Hospital supplied John Currie with ample time for reflection. Few friends came to see him, except Michaelmas, who would present the patient, when his temperature was 103°, with such unsuitable gifts as a tin of preserved peaches and the news.

The planter had escaped with his life by a fraction of an inch. The stiletto had actually pierced the sheath of his heart, as well as punctured the left lung; and he had pulled through only with the help of a strong constitution and good nursing. Olsen looked in once, as down in the mouth as he could be, taking the gloomiest view of the whole affair.

"They've given Kanapathy Pillai three months for raising a riot," he said. "He couldn't get away from that. They had to take your deposition, John; but they haven't been able to find any trace of the man who told you his name was Gerard. It's a mystery how he got away that night."

"And how's the estate?" asked Currie.

"Going to the deuce," Olsen replied. "We can't hang out much longer. Of course, the whole country's in a bad way with these labor troubles; but we're in a worse plight than anybody."

With thousands of dollars' worth of rubber destroyed, the factory burned to the ground and the coolies still out of hand, Olsen knew well enough that there wasn't a dog's chance of pulling round again. The shares were below par, and the Singapore brokers already looked upon them as a drug on the market.

On leaving hospital John Currie took three weeks' holiday in the Java Hills; and when he returned to Singapore Olsen himself came down to meet the ship and took him straight off to Ikey's Bar where, over one stinger after another, they discussed a sudden and unexpected change in the situation—which was all news to Currie. Olsen, who had drunk a great deal more than was good for him, was in a very excited condition. His hands were shaking and there was a wild look in his bloodshot eyes that for a moment made Currie doubt his sanity.

"It's all over the infernal place that I'm a wrong'un," he declared, "and on the face of things, I'm bound to confess that it looks like it. As a matter of fact, John, I've had to part with about a third of my own shares, and I wouldn't have done that if I'd known what was coming."

"I've looked at the quotations," said Currie. "They've gone up with a bound."

"Since last week," said the other. "And believe me or not, I can't account for it. I tell you, man, I've been cut stone dead in the street and I daren't show my face in the club."

Currie was puzzled. He had never pretended to be a business man. It was his job to sweat and curse in the jungle.

"There's a rush for the shares," Olsen went on, "when things on the estate are more or less at a standstill. Kanapathy Pillai may be shut up in Johore jail, but there are plenty of others to carry on the devil's work for him. We're still running the place at a loss."

"Then who has bought the shares?" asked Currie.

"Natives!" cried Olsen, banging the table with a fist. "Chinese and Malays!

The whole thing's been engineered on the sly. You were right when you told me old Michaelmas is the best man we've got. Mind you, my reputation's at stake. I'm put down as a crook."

"What's Michaelmas got to do with it?" Currie asked.

"The old fox can find out things that don't come your way or mine," said Olsen, actually laughing. "His pals are babus and Telegu clerks in stockbrokers' offices. He has been nosing about Singapore for a week. Our shares have all been handled by that oily scoundrel de Sousa-Fink, who thinks he looks like a white man. We can't be sure who the shareholders are, but there's some reason to suspect that a lot have gone to Turak—to Sleeman, of all people!"

"The sultan!" exclaimed Currie. "Have I been slaving in the jungle year after year to stock that fellow's harem!"

"Looks like it," said Olsen, dryly, "if what Michaelmas says is true. But the bulk of the capital has gone up to Shanghai."

"To whom?"

"Michaelmas says a fellow called Li-tsao-yen, who is the military governor of Hu-chau, has a finger in the pie."

"But what can a Shanghai Chinaman know about Batu Lunga?" Currie demanded.

"That's what I mean to find out if I can," said the other. "I want you to go up to Shanghai. I've got to stick to the estate, though I daren't show my face in Singapore. I propose to give you a free hand to find out what you can."

THAT was John Currie's mandate—a roving commission, so to speak. He went up to the coast on an Intermediate P. and O., and booked a room in a small hotel on the Suchau Creek, where he was wise enough not to register in his own name.

Realizing that his task was not going to be an easy one, if he were to find out anything in connection with the business affairs of a Chinese official who resided some distance from the city, he determined to keep both his identity and the object of his mission a secret. The hotel where he stayed seemed admirably suited to his purpose. It was a cheap little establishment run by a Portuguese from Macao, situated in a native quarter well away from the International Concession.

In consequence Currie experienced something in the nature of a shock when, one evening, he was accosted by a Chinese with a face pitted by smallpox, who addressed him familiarly in pidgin English and by his own name.

"You belong Mr. John Currie?" the man asked.

The abruptness of the question took the planter's breath away.

"What if I am?" he asked.

"Because have got one piece letter."

"A letter!" exclaimed Currie, in surprise. "From whom?"

The Chinaman shook his head and grinned.

"No can say," he replied. "If you belong Mr. Currie, more better you see for yourself what somebody say."

With something of reluctance the planter admitted that he was the right man, and at once an envelope was thrust into his hand and the messenger disappeared in the darkness.

Currie cursed himself for a fool for having let the man escape. He had not the least idea where the fellow had come from and a shrewd suspicion that the letter itself would tell him nothing. As it was far too dark to attempt to read the letter out of doors, he returned to the hotel, went straight up to his bedroom and lighted a candle.

Breaking open the envelope, which was sealed with green sealing wax, he read as follows, written in a minute backhanded caligraphy upon a square piece of pink paper, almost as stiff as cardboard:

> This paper should be moistened and then burned. This side upward.

It is doubtful whether a witness would have been much use to Currie. At any rate, the idea never entered his head until after his curiosity had got the better of him. He sprinkled the paper with water and then held one corner of it in the flame of the candle. To his surprise it immediately began to burn slowly, like wet guncotton. Currie continued to hold it until he was in danger of burning his fingers. Then he laid it down, the way he had been told, upon the marble slab of the washstand.

The paper had not curled, though it had gone quite black. In a similar manner to the development of a photographic plate, certain white lines began to appear that presently framed themselves into bold lettering, very much larger, but undoubtedly in the same handwriting as the preliminary instructions.

For a few moments this writing was perfectly clear. Currie had time to read what was written six or seven times; and he was obliged to do that before he could believe the evidence of his eyes. And then, as the writing vanished, the paper began slowly to curl up, crumbling in the usual way at the slightest touch.

> You are a dead man, if you are not out of Shanghai in a week.

That was all. No signature; not even a sign or mark.

To say that this incident put the wind up John Currie would be far from the truth. He had a job of work to do for Olsen and he was determined to do it; and besides, there was his own personal pride. To turn tail and bolt because he had been threatened in an anonymous letter, written with some ingenious invisible ink, never before for a moment entered his head.

At the same time, he thought it best to take reasonable precautions, and realized that a third rate, cosmopolitan hotel in a crowded Chinese district was no place for him in the circumstances. Somehow or other he had failed to pass himself off under a false name. It was obvious that he was watched and probably had been watched ever since his arrival in Shanghai. And for these reasons he saw that he would be well advised to move into the European settlement.

Everybody who has been to Shanghai knows the Hotel Nestor—the one great clearing house, as it were, for tourists in the Far East. If you change ship at the port, you stay at the Nestor until you can embark for Manila, Japan or Frisco—or wherever you want to go. The local people, also, are not averse to dining there occasionally by way of a change; whilst the hotel lounge is a convenient meeting place for business men who wish to avoid the club.

Currie had come up to China with introductions from Olsen and others in Singapore, with the object of finding out whether Li-tsao-yen, who was one of the most prominent Chinese officials in the country, had actually purchased a large number of the Batu Lunga shares, and if so, the reason why he had done so; and he knew that he would have to rely very largely upon the advice of these newfound friends.

Ignoring the threatening letter and resolved to prosecute his inquiries on every possible occasion, he put in an appearance at the Shanghai Club at least twice a day, and made a point of appearing at every public function.

It was out on the Bubbling Well Road one evening when he was on his way to the Racecourse that he first caught a glimpse of Talamera. A block in the traffic had been caused by a broken down motor car; and for a moment Currie's rickshaw drew alongside hers, which was going in the opposite direction.

In the red half light of a China evening, the alluring eccentricity of her dress lent to her beauty a suggestion of exotic mystery. Though he had had eleven years of it, John Currie was suddenly conscious, for the first time in his life, of the spell of the East. He was conscious, too, of a quick catch in his breath—and that was a thing, so far as women were concerned, that had never happened to him before.

He may have met all sorts and conditions of women, but none had ever played an important part in his life. He had just ruled them out, not because he was a woman hater, or because he was without masculine charms of his own, but because he had long since come to the conclusion that a woman on a rubber estate in the Malay jungle had a thin time of it herself, and was less consolation to a man than a case of whisky.

Though he looked at Talamera for no longer than fifteen seconds, and his experience in such matters may have been somewhat limited, he could scarcely mistake the meaning of the glance she gave him. It was something altogether different from the well feigned invitation of the practised coquette. A drowsy gaze, under lowered eyelashes, with something of a smile in it, and then a little deprecatory twist of a corner of the mouth, as much as to say she condemned fate that they might be destined never to meet.

It was more than enough for Currie. On the instant he determined to find out who she was.

NOR WAS it to be wondered at that even after she was gone, some recollection of the look that she had given him should serve to quicken his pulse. He was amazed that he should remember every detail of her dress. She had had a red flower in her black hair; and, above an accordion silk skirt, a white Indian shawl embroidered with golden thread had been wrapped tightly around her body and fastened beneath her throat with a brooch of emeralds and platinum that might have come from the Rue de la Paix.

In her complexion, as well as her dress, the Orient was mingled with the West—dark eyes that might melt to softness or flash in defiance. He found himself still thinking about her as the coolie trundled his rickshaw along the dusty road—thinking of black hair with a red flower in it. A bright scarlet water lily—a strange flower, he thought, to wear in one's hair.

He assured himself that it should not be difficult to find her in Shanghai; but he had scarcely had time to make any inquiries before she appeared again, and this time, of all places, in the lounge of the Hotel Nestor itself. The mountain had come to Mahomet.

Currie, had he thought about it at all, would have known that this was no mere coincidence. The fact was, he didn't care. When Olsen had sent him on his mission, the manager of the Batu Lunga estate had looked upon John Currie as the last man in the world who could be tricked by any woman decoy.

Talamera, on this occasion, was not alone; and her companion was in many ways as striking a personality as herself. A young Chinese who might have belonged to the flowery land of fable and romance. With a pale complexion as transparent as wax, the soft, rounded features of an Italian Madonna, and almond shaped eyes that were like those of a gazelle, there was something essentially effeminate about the man.

Even the fact that he was dressed in European clothes did not seem greatly to detract from his good looks. For he wore no hat; and his coal black hair was brushed straight back from his forehead. Also, the suit he was wearing, of a material called Milton tweed, had been well cut by a good tailor in the latest style, while his fingernails were carefully manicured.

The two sat together in a darkened corner of the lounge, and Currie had but a few minutes in which to observe them before the girl rose to her feet and left the hotel. They seemed to have quarreled; for the young man, trying in vain to catch her eyes, spoke in an undertone throughout, whilest she replied only in monosyllables and without looking at her companion. For all that, there was something about her that suggested that she was frightened. Whatever there was within her of courage and defiance was in abeyance for the time being in the presence of this sleek and self possessed young Chinaman.

Nor did she look once in John Currie's direction. She might not even have noticed him. But the moment she was gone, Currie went straight to the hall comprador, Feng How.

The famous Feng How, probably one of the fattest men in all China, was a kind of living postal directory and a guide book in one. He knew everybody in the place and everybody knew him. No matter what he was asked, he was never at a loss for an answer. He was a dealer, so to speak, in practical information, at a more or less nominal charge.

No better proof could be supplied to the effect that an atmosphere of mystery pervaded Talamera than the fact that Feng How, the omniscient, did not know who she was. To the best of his belief he had never seen her before.

"And the man?" Currie asked anxiously.

"Ah!" said Feng How, a fat smile spreading on his almost circular countenance. "That was Mr. Li."

That conveyed little or nothing to Currie, since Li was one of the commonest surnames in China. But Feng How, on receipt of a dollar, proved more informative.

Mr. Li was a wealthy young Chinese of the old aristocratic class. He had graduated at Harvard University and Oxford. He had traveled all over the world, to Vienna, Paris and Rome. And moreover —news that Currie regarded as of the most surprising importance—this self same Mr. Li was the son and heir of none other than Li-tsao-yen, the governor of Hu-chau.

To Currie, it looked as if he now had the chance of killing two birds with one stone—following the will o' the wisp that he knew had beguiled him and at the same time doing his duty for Olsen.

CHAPTER V

THE HOUSE IN THE BOULEVARD DE ROCHAMBEAU

AN INTRODUCTION to Mr. Li ought to be easy, since the young Chinese was well known among the European community. The main difficulty lay in finding a pretext. Currie could scarcely admit that he hoped subsequently to meet a certain girl to whom Mr. Li himself was obviously attracted; nor could he confess that he wanted to investigate the private affairs of the young man's distinguished father.

A friend of Olsen's, of the name of Sandifer, the former manager of the Woosung Tug and Lighter Company, who had recently lost his job through the activities of the Cantonese communists, offered a simple solution of the difficulty. In his more prosperous days, Sandifer had been an enthusiastic collector of Ming china; but, as he was now broke to the world, he was selling his stuff privately and had already arranged an interview at his own house with Mr. Li—a well known connoisseur who didn't mind what he paid for anything he happened to want.

It would be a simple matter for Currie to call upon Sandifer at the very time when Li happened to be there. As for the rest, that would depend upon Currie himself and to some extent, upon Li.

The thing worked out well enough; at least, Currie thought so at the time, though the affected voice and manner of a Chinese youth who aped the manners of the West and posed as a dilettante annoyed him exceedingly.

Whether or not John Currie concealed his irritation is a matter of no importance. He certainly pretended to take an interest in Oriental ceramics—a subject about which he knew nothing and cared less. In a mincing, almost simpering manner Mr. Li was scrupulously polite. He seemed to experience some difficulty in combining a society manner that he might have learned in Mayfair with what he could remember of the Chinese rules of good behavior. At any rate, as he and Currie left Sandifer's house together, he offered then and there to show the planter his own collection, which he believed to be one of the most valuable in the world.

Currie readily accepted; and together in the cool of the evening they walked along the bund, at the end of which they turned to the right into the French Concession. The sun went down in a purple glow against which was silhouetted the pailows and pagodas of the native city—a vision of romance, vague beyond the dirt and squalor, the dust, turmoil and confusion of a modern port.

Mr. Li led the way into a little frequented thoroughfare in the French settlement, called the Boulevard de Rochambeau, a street of suburban Paris, as remote from an Oriental city as the green plane trees that shaded its narrow sidewalks. It was a secluded street of imposing stone buildings, all built on the same plan, each three stories high, with a stucco front, windows with Venetian shutters and an ornamental porchway. The twilight and the fact that there seemed to be no living soul abroad lent to the locality a somber, melancholy appearance.

The Chinese came to a standstill before the portico of a house similar to the others in the boulevard, except that it appeared to be in a far more dilapidated condition. Most of the wooden shutters had been broken, and the plaster had come off in patches, making the front of the house look as if it had contracted some fell skin disease.

Producing a latchkey from his waistcoat pocket, the Chinese opened the front door and, passing down an unfurnished passage, ascended the stairs that creaked beneath the combined weight of the men. On either side of a corridor, illumined by two bronze Oriental lanterns suspended from the ceiling, were several doors, one of which Mr. Li threw open and motioned Currie to enter.

It was a strange room, in very truth, suggesting both an Oriental palace and a museum. By the side of a divan with an embroidered canopy there was a blackwood table upon which lay an ivory opium pipe. A frieze of carved tortoise shell displayed to advantage a collection of priceless china arranged upon a shelf that extended along three walls. Underneath this shelf were countless objects of art in ivory, jade and tortoise shell. The fourth wall was hidden behind Chinese embroideries in the most brilliant blues, greens and yellows upon a scarlet background.

The furniture and everything else in the room seemed to have come from every conceivable part of the East. There were tables, chairs, rugs and curtains from Persia, Siam and India, as well as from China and Japan.

MR. LI was inordinately proud of his possessions and took a genuine pleasure in describing the special merits of each particular piece. He seemed in some way to associate the former greatness of his country with these fragile works of art. For all his modern culture, he believed in an old China of oligarchy and corruption, of ceremonious formalities and religious rites. Continuing to talk, he wheeled an armchair to the front of the embroideries and motioned to his guest to be seated.

"Do you mean," Currie asked, "that your people would have been happier if we hadn't developed the country and opened up trade with the world?"

"I was not thinking," said Mr. Li, "so much of what China has gained within the last thirty years, as of what she has lost."

"And what is that?" asked the other.

"Her identity," said Li—a strange observation from the lips of a man who so sedulously copied the dress, manners and customs of an alien people.

He was in act of handing his guest an opened box of cigars when Currie could have sworn that he heard the curtains behind him rustling—the soft, scratching sound of silk rubbing upon silk.

"Allow me to offer you one of these," said the Chinese. "You will find them in the most excellent condition."

The planter had extended a hand to take a cigar, when something that may have been merely suspicion caused him to look round quickly. The curtains at his back had parted a matter of a few inches at a point about three feet from the floor. And through this narrow opening a hand emerged—a thin, bony hand that grasped the gold mounted handle of an ebony walking stick.

John Currie leaped from his seat; and even as he did so he heard the sharp metallic sound of a strong spring suddenly released.

So quickly had he left his chair that he struck his head against an iron lantern that was hanging from the ceiling. From the ferrule of the ebony walking stick he saw a bright steel blade flash in the light, and he realized that he had escaped by the skin of his teeth.

He had seen that walking stick before, as he had seen, too, that skinny, clawlike hand. He had little doubt that behind the embroidered curtains was the same black bearded Frenchman who had tried to murder him at Batu Lunga. He had a revolver in the pocket of his coat. Though it cost him his life he would find out the truth.

Resolved to draw the curtain aside to discover who was beyond, he had taken a quick step forward, when suddenly Mr. Li seized him from behind, pinning his arms to his sides.

In a square fight there would have been no question between the physical strength of the Malay rubber planter and this slim, esthetic Chinaman. But Li had the advantage from the first. Locking his fingers together, he held on like grim death with all his weight, knowing that, if his opponent forced his arms apart and freed himself, he would be knocked down by a single blow.

Currie adopted the only tactics possible in the circumstances. Unable to use his arms, he made the most of his superior weight. Suddenly, and with all the violence of a desperate man, he flung himself upon the floor, taking the Chinaman with him. In his fall, luck was with him; for, whereas the planter himself came down upon the carpet, Li struck his head against the edge of a roll topped writing desk that stood to the left of the window.

Though the man did not lose consciousness, he slackened his grip for an instant, and that gave Currie the chance he wanted. The planter forced his arms free and in a moment was on his feet again. Three strides took him to the curtains. Drawing them aside with his left hand, he held the revolver in his right. There seemed to be a space of two or three feet between the embroideries and the wall, a gap that, naturally enough, was deep in the shade.

It took him several seconds to make sure that there was no one there; and by that time he had to defend himself again, for Li had struggled to his feet and had already half pulled out a drawer of the writing desk, where no doubt he knew that he would find a weapon of some sort. Except for the eyes, the young Chinese's expression had not changed. He had the same soft, angelic countenance, though his eyes were bright as steel and had narrowed to the merest slits.

FORTUNATELY for Currie it took the Chinese a moment to find what he wanted; and in that brief space of time the immaculate Mr. Li was knocked out of the world of conscious things. Currie had been wise enough not to fire. A blow from his fist was more than enough to settle this scented dandy with the figure of a male mannikin and the face of a china Buddha. An uppercut under the chin sent the man reeling across the room to lie senseless on the floor.

Currie was back at the curtains in an instant. In desperation he wrenched them down, tearing them away from the pole that supported them. The wall beyond was fully exposed to his view—a bare wall in the middle of which was a narrow door within an alcove. He tried the handle, first with one hand, then with both. The door had been locked from the other side; and he realized at once that no human strength could open it. Nor could he see anything heavy enough in the room with which to batter it down.

Knowing that he must escape from the house and that he obviously had no time to lose, he flew to the other door. And that, too, was locked.

For a moment he stood irresolute, looking down at the prone figure on the floor. That senseless fop in a suit of Milton tweed, stretched at his full length upon a colored rug in the midst of his curios and bric-à-brac, was even at that moment to

John Currie more like the vision of a dream than any actual fact. For a moment the mystery of the whole thing made him oblivious of the circumstance that he was imprisoned in that house and escape seemed impossible.

There was more than one aspect of his present situation that baffled him entirely. There was no getting away from the evidence of the ebony walking stick. The Frenchman with the black beard, whom he had found with the natives in the Hindu shrine at Batu Lunga, was in that very house.

Currie stood in the middle of the room, listening; but, though he strained his ears, he could hear no sound. That was, perhaps, the most extraordinary part of the whole business. The Frenchman must have known that he had failed in his purpose, that his accomplice was at John Currie's mercy; and yet, he had made no attempt to come to Li's rescue.

That he would return in a moment and that this time there would be others with him was almost a certainty. Currie, realizing that somehow or other he must succeed in making his escape, bethought him of the window which looked out upon the street. Opening this and throwing back the shutters, he leaned out as far as he could. He could see no one in the boulevard where it was now quite dark; he immediately discovered a possible means of escape.

There was no way of descending to the ground direct; but about three feet below the sill was a ledge of masonry upon which he thought he could walk as far as a drain pipe on the other side of the next window. At any rate he resolved to risk it, though he doubted whether the ledge, which looked to be of plaster, would bear his weight.

Having decided upon a definite course of action and seeing nothing to prevent him making his escape when he wanted to, for the moment he allowed his natural curiosity to get the better of him. He was not going to leave that house until he had made an attempt to find out something about its occupants. In view of what had happened, there was some reason to suppose that it was the black bearded Frenchman who had written the anonymous threatening letter.

LI STILL lay upon the ground, unconscious; and John Currie was free to search the room. A glance was enough to assure him that nowhere would he be more likely to find evidence of the kind he wanted than in the writing desk.

The roll top of the desk was closed and locked; but a bunch of keys lay upon the floor where they had fallen from Li's hand when Currie had knocked him senseless. It took the planter no more than a few seconds to find the right key. Upon the top of the desk was a litter of papers, for the most part business letters signed by de Sousa-Fink, bearing the address of the broker's office in Singapore. After glancing rapidly through these, Currie tried the drawers, one after the other, to discover something that caused a catch in his breath. For he came upon a number of share certificates and transfers in the Batu Lunga Rubber Estate Company Ltd., registered in various names that included Constant Gerard, Pierre Vautour, Li-tsao-yen and young Mr. Li himself.

Resolved to go further into the matter at his leisure, the planter stuffed the certificates into his coat pocket, feeling that he was in some way justified in robbing a man who had attempted to murder him. Continuing to ramsack the drawers in the writing desk, he discovered similar certificates relating to the Woosung Tug and Lighter Company, the Yangtse Flour Mills and Invicta Mineral Waters.

Though he had not been long in Shanghai, he had heard enough of the local news to guess the truth. On the instant it occurred to him that every one of these companies had been ruined quite recently by strikes or outside opposition from native sources.

This was the evidence that Olsen wanted. It was enough at any rate for Currie who, hearing voices in the passage outside the door, hurried back to the window and climbed out.

At once he recognized that the situation was more dangerous than he liked; for the shutters to which he was compelled to cling were rotten with age and damp and the narrow ledge upon which he stood might at any moment give way beneath his weight.

Inch by inch he worked his way toward the next window, in which upon a sudden there appeared a light. Realizing that he would have to run the gauntlet, he swung himself forward, until he had gained the firm masonry of the sill, when he was brought up breathless, face to face with a circumstance that was even more surprising than alarming.

The shutters being wide open, he was able to see into the room—much the same kind of room as that from which he had escaped, suggesting the height of luxury, with its embroidered cushions and draped walls. But he had eyes less for the details of the room itself than for its occupant. He could see her standing straight in front of him and not more than a few feet away, with her head turned a little to one side, alert and yet immobile. And it was the girl in the white Indian shawl, with the red water lily in her hair, whom he had seen in the rickshaw and in the lounge of the hotel.

CHAPTER VI

TALAMERA

FOR SEVERAL seconds John Currie watched her, looked her straight in the eyes. There was no sign of fear about her. Indeed, with one hand lifted almost to the level of her chin and holding between the first and second fingers of that hand a lighted cigaret, she might have been posing for an artist, until, very deliberately, she took a step forward and threw the window open.

"*Que faites vous?*" she asked. "*Monsieur, ce n'est pas bien!*"

Currie still stared at her; and although her back was to the light, he could see that she was smiling—white, even teeth, made to look even whiter than they were by a complexion that was almost olive. Here eyes were at once half sleepy, filled with merriment. They were as bright as they were dark, and yet, the eyelids were half closed, giving her a lazy, dreamy look.

"*Qu'est-ce que vous voulez?*" she demanded.

John Currie was conscious of the falsity of his position, as well as something about it that was almost ludicrous.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "if you can, speak English. I apologize for this intrusion. I am not here of my own free will."

At that she laughed outright.

"That much is obvious, monsieur," she replied in broken English. "They would have murdered you. You were brought here to be killed."

"I know," said he. "A trap, a plot against my life, in which, mademoiselle, I have some reason to suspect that you yourself were concerned."

She feigned astonishment, even indignation, though she still laughed softly in the manner of a coquette who has been flattered.

"What reason have you to say that?" she asked.

Currie answered under his breath. The girl was so close to him that he was conscious that his pulse had quickened. He knew that he had but a few moments in which to speak to her, and that those moments were doubly precious.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "I saw you for the first time in the Bubbling Well Road. You may have forgotten that, but I never will. I see no reason why you should not know the truth. I was determined to see you again."

"And that is why you came here?" she asked.

"One of the reasons," said he.

"Monsieur," she said, "you honor me."

And then she leaned forward over the window sill, so close to him that he could feel her breath upon his ear.

"Tell me," she whispered, "you have killed Li? The man who looks like a woman and who has the heart of a devil snake? I tell you, monsieur," she added, excitedly, "there is in Java a snake that they call the devil snake. It is so beautiful, so quiet as Li. It looks so harmless; yet it strikes swiftly and its bite is death. Ah, but I hate his smooth voice, his face that never moves, the black slits of eyes that look at me all day, so cold, and yet so fierce. But, tell me, you have killed him, yes?"

She asked her question with intense eagerness, as if everything depended upon Currie's answer.

"No," said he. "I've done no more than knock him out—less than he deserves. It's the other man I want. And I'll get him yet!"

"Vautour!" she exclaimed. "Bah, you are a fool! You must be mad!"

"He told me once his name was Gerard," Currie observed.

"That is possible," she answered, with a shrug. "But, whatever he calls himself, he will be more than a match for you. Take my advice—though I have no right to give it—and get out of this place as quick as possible. Why," she added, "you would never have a chance against Pierre—not one little chance! And now, get away while you have time! You are —how you call it?—a cool customer; but that will not save you from Vautour."

"One thing more," said Currie. "One more question before I go. What are the three of you doing here, living together in the same house? And what have you got to do with the man you call Vautour?"

"That is my affair," she answered. "It is yours to save your life. Adieu. I like you. It would be a pity for you to die."

SHE CLOSED the window gently and, when Currie had passed on, she drew back the shutters. His eyes accustomed to the bright light, the planter could not at first see in the darkness; but eventually, extending his right arm, he grasped the drain pipe that he had seen from the other window.

Thence he was able to lower himself to the ground, finding support for his feet at the joints. In the boulevard he looked back at the house to make sure that he would be able to find it again. Then he set off, running, until he came into the more frequented streets of the International Concession.

He may have done wrong not to take any steps that same night to track down Pierre Vautour and his two strange confederates. Had he then put the matter into the hands of the International police, Vautour might never have got away. But Currie, realizing that if he accused the Frenchman and Li of an attempt to murder him, the girl herself would also be implicated, was prepared to make a fool of himself for the first time in his life, where a woman was concerned.

And then, when he did report the matter, it was too late. In no other country but China could the thing have been done so secretly and swiftly. By ten o'clock the following morning, when the house in the Boulevard de Rochambeau was searched, it was discovered that not only were the occupants gone, but that all Li's personal possessions—his furniture, carpets, all his ornaments and even his priceless collection of china—had been moved during the night.

No trace of the fugitives could be found. It was soon established as a certainty that they had left the Concessions; but the Chinese city itself contained a hundred hiding places for those who had friends in the native quarter. It was thought possible they had gone upriver, even as far as the city of Chung-king. The black bearded Frenchman may have been a man easy to recognize from his description; but no one was likely to give information against the son of the governor of a province.

As a matter of fact, Vautour himself was out of Shanghai before John Currie had made up his mind what to do. The man went on board a native junk, sailing north by way of the Grand Canal. He had his own reasons for not booking a passage on one of the coastal ships bound for Taku. He wanted no awkward questions from customs officers or consuls. But, though he took the safer route, it meant that many weeks had elapsed before he had reached his destination—the treaty port of Tientsin.

And by then John Currie had got the hang of things; for he had received a report from Olsen, in the handwriting of Michaelmas. Kanapathy Pillai was a reformed character. Released from jail, he pretended to have seen the error of his ways. Influenced to a great extent by the eloquence of a man whom they had always followed blindly, the coolies had gone back to work, the factory was being rebuilt and the estate well in hand.

So much was in due accordance with everything that Currie had found out for himself. Sandifer had enlightened him upon the subject of the Woosung Tug and Lighter Company. To a man, their coolies had joined the communist forces and had deserted in a body to Hankow, after first destroying the property of their employers. Half a dozen tugs and twice as many barges had been scuttled at the river mouth, the coolies using dynamite that could only have been procured from communist headquarters.

More or less the same thing applied to other foreign business houses in the treaty ports. When ruin stared them in the face, their shares had been bought up right and left, obviously by native speculators with plenty of money behind them who had some reason to anticipate more prosperous days.

As unrest in the country spread northward from Canton, and men who had given the best years of their lives to commercial projects in the Far East grew more and more depressed, it became common talk in the Shanghai Club that there existed a ring of native financiers with an anti-foreign policy, whose main idea was to get into their hands the bulk of the business interests that had been founded and organized by Americans and Europeans.

Currie remained for weeks in Shanghai, searching with untiring patience for what he despaired of finding. He could hear news of neither Vautour nor Mr. Li; and had it not been for Talamera he would long since have given the matter up as a bad job and returned to Singapore.

And then came word of violent disturbances in the north. Wherever was Pierre Vautour there also was trouble. The man was like a bird of ill omen, a stormy petrel in a land of unrest and disorder. Riots in the native city of Tientsin led to an armed mob entering the settlements, where activities were directed against the premises of the Anglo-American Fur Company. The native police proved inadequate to the situation; and before allied troops could be hurried to the scene, the night watchman had been murdered and a great godown containing millions of dollars' worth of Mongolian furs had been burned.

THIS news confirmed Currie's suspicions, based upon information he had already received, that Vautour had gone north, in all probability taking Talamera with him. At any rate, he made up his mind to leave Shanghai at once, and on the very eve of his departure Feng How, the fat hotel comprador, came to him with the news that there was a man in the hall who wished to see him on urgent business.

The planter at once went downstairs and gave vent to an exclamation of astonishment when he recognized his visitor. There was no possibility of his having made a mistake, though it had been in the semi-darkness of an unlighted street when he had seen the man before. For this was the same wizened, little, pockmarked Chinese who had brought him the threatening letter that could only have come from Vautour. Moreover, the man spoke in the same voice, in the same quaint pidgin English, clipping his words; and he had a habit of rubbing his hands together when he talked, as if he were cold.

"Missee Talamera belong sorry," he said. "Wanchee you chop chop. Talkee me give you this."

He had spoken in a half whisper, having first made sure that Currie and he were alone, that there was no chance that the inquisitive Feng How would overhear what was said. And as he ended speaking, he produced from the sleeves of his Chinese coat the crushed and faded bloom of a scarlet water lily.

"Who gave you this?" asked Currie.

For some reason he had found it difficult to speak. The thing was so sudden, so unexpected. Talamera's scarlet lotus flower—a token.

"Missee," said the man. "All belong proper. More better you come now."

"Where?"

"Haining," said the man. "Plenty *li* from Shanghai. Missee letter have got true talk. I speak can catch you."

He fumbled in the other sleeve of his coat from which he presently produced a very crumpled envelope upon which was neither name nor address.

Currie tore it open and read the words, ill spelled and almost illegible, scrawled with a blunt pencil upon a half sheet of notepaper that bore the printed address in English of Mr. Li's house in the Boulevard de Rochambeau in the French Concession of Shanghai.

> Monsieur—
>
> Make haste to my help. I am powerless in the hands of the devil snake and there is no one to protect me. Lofee will show the way.
>
> —TALAMERA.

Currie felt that he wanted time to think. Also, it was as if he wanted air to breathe.

"And are you Lofee?" he asked.

"Belong my name," said the Chinaman. "Belong Honan man. Velly fond missee."

"Wait here a moment," said Currie. "I want to work this out."

TELLING the hotel comprador to keep an eye on the Honanese, he went out into the streets with Talamera's letter in his hand. He stood for awhile watching the passing rickshaws, coolies and beggars jostling one another, half naked, round faced children, a bespectacled gentleman with a gray goat's beard who had been flying a kite and a very fat Chinaman who was taking a pet canary for an evening walk, the bird being tied by the leg to a wooden perch.

It seemed at that moment to John Currie that his disordered mind had been affected by the atmosphere of this chaotic country of muddle and confusion. The bearer of Talamera's letter was the same man who had brought him the warning that an attempt would be made upon his life. He knew well enough that he had gone to Li's house in the Boulevard de Rochambeau only because he had thought there might be a chance of finding out something about the girl. But he had never expected to see her there. And the fact that he had done so proved her to be nothing but Vautour's decoy.

And if she had endeavored to betray him once, what reason was there to suppose that she would not do so again? He had no proof that the letter was genuine, that the man with the ebony walking stick was many hundred miles away. If he walked deliberately into such an open trap and paid the penalty with his life, no one who knew him and the whole truth of the matter would think him anything but a fool. And yet, it took him not five minutes to make up his mind. On the night when he had escaped from the house in the boulevard, the girl had been solicitous for his safety; she had even gone so far as to warn him against Vautour. And she had told him, too, that she was afraid of Li.

He was prepared to trust his life to the honor of a girl of whom he knew nothing, except that she was a halfcaste, living with a man who was a dangerous criminal. It was no mere sense of chivalry that urged him to take the risk. Though he had spoken but a few words to her and had seen her only three times, there was something about her that appealed so strongly to him that nothing else counted. Even if he walked straight into a death trap from which there was no escape, he would go. Madness, perhaps, and no part of his duty to Olsen; but, his mind made up, he went straight back to the little pockmarked Honanese.

"I'll start at once," said he.

He had picked up a few words in the local dialect; and these, together with Lofee's pidgin English, were enough for all the intercourse they wanted.

The Chinaman grinned and nodded.

"Belong proper," said he.

"Where exactly am I going to?" Currie asked. "I want to let my friends know that—in case of accidents."

"No can do," said Lofee. "Speak plenty much, me finish."

He illustrated his meaning by wiping a forefinger around his neck, while at the same time making a peculiar and somewhat disgusting noise with his teeth to convey that, if he betrayed the whereabouts of the immaculate Mr. Li, his head would be cut off without formalities or waste of time.

Currie shrugged his shoulders. After all, it couldn't make much difference to him. It took him but a few minutes to settle his account at the hotel and to hand over what little baggage he had to the safe keeping of the manager. As for the luggage he took with him, in his thinking, all he needed upon such a journey was a Webley revolver and both the pockets of his white duck suit filled with rounds of ammunition.

Thus he went out, with but a vague idea of his destination and how he was going to get there. Lofee shuffled along the narrow lighted streets by the Suchau Creek, in the quarter where Currie had stayed when he had first come to Shanghai.

AT A CERTAIN place upon the winding, crowded creek a *wupan*, or light river junk, lay moored to a bamboo jetty, her *laoban* squatting on his haunches under the matting awning in the bows, sucking a bamboo opium pipe. He was a big, rawboned man, strong as a mule and ugly as a monkey. When he saw Lofee with a foreign devil he evinced neither curiosity nor any other emotion.

He just rose to his feet as the two came on board, loosed his boat from her moorings, shoved her clear of the clustered, surrounding shipping and headed downstream toward the river. There he hoisted his great sail that looked out of all proportion to the size of his craft; and the *wupan* steered for the broad estuary of the Yangtze.

The lights of Shanghai faded out of sight. The *wupan* stood forth upon the broad, smooth waters, where the darkness seemed to be alive with invisible craft of every kind—sirens and hooters, some near at hand, some far away; the rattle of chain and hawser; the shrill cries of the junkmen who earned their rice upon the great sacred river and firecrackers discharged by those who were outward bound in order to placate the Water dragon and the devil gods that come up from the sea.

CHAPTER VII

THE YAMEN OF KIN-MUN

SKIRTING the southern coastline of the Yangtze estuary, the *laoban* turned into one of the innumerable waterways that connect the Woosung with the Grand Canal, and all night long he picked his way through a veritable network of canals, some so narrow that there was scarce room for the *wupan* to pass between the anchored junks.

By morning they had struck the Grand Canal with its endless stone embankment, where the *wupan* passed under bridges built in the Sung dynasty, of every conceivable shape and kind, with parapets carved in stone and attendant lions and dragons. And here, too, were battered and moss grown memorial arches, rising above the crimson of tallow trees and mulberries, while the intervening marshes were cut up into ling-gardens where the morning sun shone red upon the standing water between the trees.

John Currie lay idle upon the deck on the *wupan*. Drowsy—because he had slept little that night—it was as if he were half dreaming, half awake. Instead of being engaged upon a dangerous adventure, he might have been drifting into the heart of some quaint, wondrous fairyland, an old land set apart from all the busy world, where the skyline was broken only by pailow and pagoda, where the waters mingled with the misty sky.

By midday the summer sun was beating down upon them with an intensity that made the deck hot to the touch. But the *laoban*, who seemed insensible to fatigue, remained at the helm; while Lofee, the Honanese, sat propped against the mast, his disfigured face immobile, expressionless, as he watched the sails of far distant junks moving in all directions like great birds that skimmed across the lowlands.

At Samen the *laoban* turned from the main waterway into narrow minor canals where the bridges were few and far between and many so low that he had to lower his mast in order to pass under. But even these watery byways were crowded with native craft—the foot boats of pedlars, ling farmers' sampans and barges loaded to the gunwales with merchandise and market produce.

Twice only in forty-eight hours when they had come again into the Grand Canal did they haul down the sail and tie up alongside the embankment. For the *laoban*, though a Chinese, must sleep and eat like other men, though there was no question in Currie's mind that the man had been well paid to get south to Haining with as little delay as possible.

IT WAS on the evening of the second day that, passing under a bridge, they entered the broad moat under the walls of Haining, where the *laoban* moored by the stone bund on the northern bank of the Tsien-tang. And when Lofee had paid him his fare in silver dollars, the man bade his passengers a courteous farewell and disappeared into the midst of the crowd that thronged the wharf, to spend a portion of his earnings upon an overdue debauch.

John Currie had now some reason to believe that he was near the end of his journey.

"And where now?" he asked of the secretive Lofee.

"To Kin-mun," said the Honanese. "Can catch sampan. Find missee tonight."

It was evident that the man, in spite of his unprepossessing appearance, was Talamera's slave. Though no doubt he got as much squeeze as he could out of the money entrusted to him, he had her genuine interests at heart. While Currie, as a foreign devil, was subjected to the critical jeers and facetious remarks of the coolies on the Haining bund, Lofee bargained with the owner of a sampan to take them to their destination, the yamen of Kin-mun.

The moon rose early that night—a round, watery moon in a sky where the stars were blotted out by the hot, moist wind, or *fou*, which was now blowing from the southwest. The sampan dropped down the Tsien-tang current until out of sight of the city and then turned to the north into a canal that was little more than a broad ditch. The same rich lowlands mile upon mile, watery ricefields, or the tall growing *kiao-liang* that rustled in the breeze, and here and there, pollard mulberry trees, growing in irregular rows like willows, so that they resembled the teeth of a broken comb.

And then, toward midnight, the nature of the country changed. The marshlands gave way to undulating hills where there were clumps of trees, and tea gardens. The sampan man brought his boat alongside the bank near a stone bridge with circular arches; and Lofee stepped ashore.

Quite suddenly the Honanese seemed to have lost all power of initiative. He stood silent and motionless for a long time, until the sampan was out of sight and the sound of the sweep of the oar had died away in the distance. He stood hugging himself, as if he were cold, though the night was steaming hot. Currie's clothes were wringing wet.

"Lofee," said the planter, "do we stay here all night, my friend? Have you brought me here for nothing?"

When the man answered it was plain he was afraid. It had been a comparatively simple matter to escape with Talamera's money. It was another thing to return, to risk being caught red handed by runners and attendants.

"*Hai-ya!*" he sighed. "If Li make bobbery, you and me belong dead men. Missee's pidgin plenty danger."

At that he turned and proceeded at a kind of jog trot on tiptoe along a path that led uphill, Currie finding it as much as he could do to keep up with the man.

After a while, out of breath and perspiring, they came to a place that resembled in the moonlight a walled city in miniature. For here were many buildings with curved, fantastic roofs, all surrounded by a low outer wall within which other walls could be seen, each with its painted, ornamental gateways. The whole place, half hidden as it was among the trees, was in darkness. The silence was broken only by the crickets that were singing in the *kiao-liang* that grew to the very foot of the outer wall.

For some distance they had been following a path that led to the main gateway, upon which a painted dragon looked silvery in the moonlight. But now Lofee turned to the right and, following a track through the millet, came presently to a tall tree, a horizontal branch of which overhung the wall.

The Honanese signed to Currie to be silent. And then, one after the other, they climbed the tree, scrambled along the overhanging branch and lowered themselves upon the top of the wall. Descent upon the other side was easy enough; for here was a courtyard where there was a great pile of rubbish against the wall. It was but necessary to drop a matter of a few feet, and they were inside the *yamen*.

Though they had gained no more than one of the outer courtyards, the very fact that a stone wall was at his back was enough to make Currie realize that he had now crossed the Rubicon. He had gone too far to turn back. He was in the hands of Lofee who, though he may have been as frightened as a mouse in a cage, seemed to have a definite idea as to what he intended to do.

Without saying a word, and taking Currie by the hand, the Chinese led his companion to the other end of the courtyard, where the distance was no more than ten yards between the inner and outer walls which were linked together by a two storied outhouse in such a dilapidated condition that it looked as if at any moment it might collapse.

ENTERING on tiptoe, they heard the scurrying of rats, while Currie's nostrils were immediately offended by the pungent smell of Chinese garlic. The place appeared to be a storeroom for all kinds of vegetable produce that had been left to rot.

Lofee guided Currie up a stepladder to the upper room, which was nothing but an attic with a single window that was coated thick with dust and cobwebs. Here he thought it safe to speak, though he did so only in a whisper. He sat down cross-legged by the side of his companion, whose eyes were gradually becoming accustomed to the darkness. The little moonlight that succeeded in finding its way into the place through the dusty, narrow window disclosed nothing but broken tea cases and old tubs that had once contained salt and grease, transported from the north by way of the Grand Canal.

"Plenty safe here," the Chinaman remarked. "You wait. Me catch chow. No one come here. Daytime plenty piece men bottom side."

"And how long do you expect me to stop in this place?" demanded Currie.

Up to this point Lofee, in true Oriental fashion, had told his companion next to nothing of his plans. And now the Honanese merely shrugged his shoulders.

"No can say," he observed. "Missee locked up. Bimeby p'laps Li let her out. Then I catch you. Speak true talk. Lofee can do; you see. Master sleep all day long."

Before Currie could say a word in reply Lofee was gone down the ladder to the room below and thence into the outer courtyard.

A moment after, John Currie, now to all intents and purposes a prisoner, heard him again. By then Lofee was on the roof of the outhouse, immediately above Currie's head. As he scrambled along the loose, broken tiles, dust and plaster descended in a shower upon the unfortunate planter who, left to himself, had already begun to regret that he had ever embarked upon such a harebrained enterprise.

He was beginning to ask himself why he was there at all, when the only man he had really wanted to run to earth was that black bearded Frenchman with the ebony walking stick, who had twice attempted to murder him. He tried to work the thing out in his own mind, to analyze his feelings; and he realized for the first time that his motives had been prompted as much by jealousy as revenge. It was something more than vulgar curiosity that had brought John Currie at dead of night into the *yamen* of Kin-mun.

In the meantime, smothered in dust and dirt, he sat listening to Lofee who was scrambling along the roof, from which he presently hoisted himself to the top of the inner wall of the *yamen*. After that, all was silent for half an hour or more; and then the Honanese appeared again with a bowl of rice and a pitcher of cold green tea.

The East had made John Currie something of a fatalist. He was sure only of one thing, namely, that he could trust this little, pockmarked Chinese; and in view of that he was content to let events shape themselves. If the worst came to the worst, he was armed, and might attempt to escape by the way he had come.

For four days and nights he remained in that dark and dusty attic. By night he obtained what little sleep he could, disturbed by the rats and bats that clung in clusters to the rafters. There was no fresh air to breathe. Apart from the smell of garlic—and the Chinese variety is the most pungent in the world—the heat was insufferable; for there was no means of opening the window, and in any case it would not have been safe to do so.

Lofee made his appearances unexpectedly, though always at night like some attendant genius. He always brought with him such food as he could obtain; and although Currie preferred plain rice to many of the disgusting so called luxuries with which he was supplied, he was in no position to be fastidious.

On the fourth night Lofee turned up highly excited. He was indeed in such a breathless condition that he was incapable of speaking coherently.

So far as Currie could make out, the opportunity for which the little Honanese had been waiting had at last arrived. It appeared that for weeks Li had been making overtures to Talamera. The fact that the girl had persistently ignored the compliments paid her had not had the slightest effect upon the serene, smooth faced Chinese, who had pride of the kind that is incapable of being wounded. Lacking in sympathy and caring nothing whatever for the girl's preferences or feelings, Mr. Li had resorted to methods scarcely in keeping with his professed ideas of culture. With almost unlimited money at his disposal and a veritable army of retainers to do his bidding, he had kidnapped her by force, while Vautour was absent in the north.

THE GIRL had been hidden by the Frenchman in the heart of the Chinese city, well out of the reach of the Shanghai International police. But a whiff of choloroform and a steam launch on the Woosung at midnight had presented no difficulties to Mr. Li; and Talamera had recovered consciousness to find herself many miles from Shanghai, halfway to Haining on the old Grand Canal.

There can be no reason to suppose that Li had either treated her roughly or threatened her in any way. As a well bred Chinese, he knew how to be polite, as he could be implacable and patient. Though he professed an ardent passion for the halfcaste girl, his heart was adamant, his ears deaf to her pleadings. Assured of the superiority of his own celestial race, with confidence in his own personal charms and the power of his riches, he was content to bide his time.

In his *yamen* he received her as an honored guest. There was nothing he would not give her, save her freedom. He greeted her always with the same self assured smile that caused her hot blood to reach boiling point with indignation. In the end the Chinese, by sheer perseverance and the strength of personality, persuaded her to accept an invitation to dinner. She resolved ,without fail to turn her defeat into the hour of her triumph.

All this had the indefatigable Lofee discovered when he came to John Currie with the news that the crucial moment had come. He had got his information from Li's personal servants and knew the details of every arrangement for the evening. As for Currie, he was ready to risk anything for freedom, even if that freedom were but temporary, to end with death or torture. Action was all he wanted after four days of close confinement in an evil smelling room.

Lofee guided him down the stepladder into the courtyard and thence up a ruined buttress to the roof. The passage across the roof itself was dangerous to a man of Currie's weight; for the broken tiles were supported by rafters soft with dry rot. But from the gable at the end it was easy enough to hoist oneself to the top of the inner *yamen* wall which they followed for some distance until they came upon a ladder already placed in position by Lofee.

At the bottom Currie found himself in the midst of many quaint one storied buildings, standing upon different levels and built, as it seemed, without reason or design. Between these were gardens where bamboos and shrubs were growing in great earthenware vases, where there were arches, terraces and steps.

In some of the houses there were lights; but the windows of most were in darkness. They ascended a few steps to a paved court beyond an open dragon gate, immediately in front of which was a curtained doorway.

And to the right of this doorway there was an opened window; and the room beyond being illumined with many lamps, John Currie saw Talamera once again, much as he had seen her before in the Boulevard de Rochambeau in the French Concession of Shanghai. Only now she was in the heart of the old China for which Li had professed such unbounded admiration—a labyrinth of ancient walls, wherein ruined monuments of the past seemed to guard the same eternal secrets as the impenetrable faces of a people who can never die.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE GRAND CANAL

SHE WAS dressed in the style that she seemed always to affect, with a shawl wrapped close about her, only the shawl she now wore was a black lace mantilla and there was no red lotus flower in her hair.

Li, though he was dressed in Chinese clothes, entertained her in the Western fashion. They sat facing one another at a small round table upon which was a linen tablecloth and polished silver. The room, too, was furnished with gilded furniture from Paris of the period of Louis Quinze—chairs, mirrors and cabinets which the owner might have bought in the Rue de Rivoli itself. As there was nothing Chinese to be seen through the open window, except a few specimens of Li's collection of china in glass cabinets and corner cupboards, Currie might have been eavesdropping at some luxurious *cabinet particulier* in one of the more expensive restaurants in Montmartre.

The one incongruity that ruined the illusion was the Chinese himself. In his soft silk robes, with his impenetrable, handsome yellow face, he seemed to be more in keeping with the fantastic dragon gateways of the *yamen* and the curved roofs of the buildings that were silhouetted sharply against the starlight beyond the wall.

All was silence. Though Li was seen to be speaking, his voice was inaudible to the two who stood without, while the girl was almost contentiously expressionless. They were attended by one soft footed servant who moved noiselessly about the room, or else stood sphinxlike at his master's elbow.

Lofee whispered to Currie; his voice came in jerks like a man out of breath from running. They had withdrawn into the darkness of an alcove in the garden wall that immediately faced the house, where there was little chanceof their being discovered, even should any one enter the garden itself.

"Bimeby Chung-yat he go," said Lofee.

"And who's Chung-yat?" asked Currie.

"Number One boy," said the Honanese. "Li speak him wanchee talk missee all alone. You wait, you see. I speak true talk."

For the better part of an hour John Currie possessed his soul in patience. And all that time he watched Talamera with increasing interest. She was as self possessed as ever, and quite calm.

Her manner must have told Li plainly that he was no more to her than his expressionless compatriot who served them. She smoked one cigaret after another until the atmosphere in the room was so thick that Currie could scarcely see across it and the aromatic smell of Turkish tobacco drifted across the little paved garden.

Occasionally Lofee whispered in Currie's ear, as if he could not contain himself. They were so close to each other that their shoulders were touching; and the planter was aware that his Chinese confederate was trembling with excitement. It was as if the Honanese thought it necessary to do his best to bolster up the white man's courage, as if Currie might fail him at the eleventh hour. For the first time during their brief intercourse he became almost confidential. He explained that it would be easy enough to hold up Li the moment he was left alone with the girl. With a loaded revolver leveled at his head, the young Chinese who had lived a sheltered life of dissipated ease would show no fight. Lofee, producing from the sleeve of his coat a very effective gag, declared Li would not be discovered by his own servants until late the following morning; and by then the fugitives would be well away. A sampan was ready waiting for them on one of the backwaters of the Tsien-tang, and their old *wupan* lay at anchor at the junction of the Grand Canal.

And once they were back in Shanghai, Lofee knew of a safe place where not even Li would ever find them. And then came the matter that to the astute little Honanese was the most important of all. He spoke for the first time of Pierre Vautour, the foreign devil with a black beard and snake's eyes who had never yet failed to reward handsomely those who rendered him service. Vautour would pay almost any money—Lofee was positive of that—to have Talamera back again. And when he knew the truth, it would go ill with the son of Li-tsao-yen, for the Frenchman was one who never forgave his enemies.

John Currie did not stand in need of this encouragement. He had not come all these miles to show the white feather at the crucial moment. He had a bone to pick with Li on another account and besides, he knew that, if he recaptured the girl, he must eventually come face to face with Vautour.

AT LAST the servant withdrew and Li and Talamera were left alone. Currie watched them for five minutes, hoping for a favorable moment to approach the window unseen.

They still talked, Talamera trying perhaps to reason with the man, using her woman's wits against that smiling, imperturbable figure in frozen wax. He sat quietly smoking, sometimes emphasizing his words with little movements of the thin hand that lay idle on the table. Unfortunately for Currie, he sat half facing the window, the sill of which was little more than two feet above the level of the ground.

Currie was obliged on that account to go down upon all fours and crawl stealthily across the garden. Even then, fearing lest his face should come into the light, he took such advantage as he could of the earthenware vases that were ranged on either side of the narrow pavements.

He had told Lofee to remain behind, for he knew that the Honanese was far too excited to render him the slightest help. Since this business had to be settled one way or the other, he would rather go through with it alone.

When he was immediately under the window he was able to hear their voices, though he understood not a word of what was said, since they conversed fluently in French, a language of which the planter had retained only the most rudimentary schoolboy knowledge. By the sound of their voices he could tell that as yet neither one nor the other had the upper hand. It was a conflict of personalities not easily swayed, the will power of a girl with all her wits about her and that of a man accustomed to have his own way in all things. Li was persuasive, soft voiced, as if he tried to be ingratiating. There was something in his tone that suggested that he had both determination and infinite patience, that he was confident that in the end she must surrender.

As for the girl, she was no less resolved, though she seemed to be at the end of what patience was hers. For, as Currie listened, he heard her stamp her foot upon the floor, while at the same time she raised her voice a little and broke into low derisive laughter.

A Manchu by descent, an aristocrat by birth, Li could ignore anything but mockery. His ineffable conceit rebelled against it. It occurred to him that the girl might have overlooked the fact that he had been pleased to be courteous and indulgent. In the same soft voice, without changing the expression of his face, he reminded her that she had best not irritate the man who held her in his power.

She laughed again at that—a ripple of laughter that brought the Chinese quickly to his feet to change both his tactics and his tone.

Still speaking in French, he warned her to be careful. Though he was a Chinese, he was a man; and like other men, he had both his passions and his pride. His words were cut short with a little gasp. That was the only sign of surprise he gave. He never moved a muscle of his smooth, oval face. He just stood at the table, staring straight at the gleaming barrel of the revolver that rested on the window sill.

Talamera, prepared for this emergency, gave vent to a sigh; not so much a sigh of relief as an expression of lazy satisfaction. She had learned from Lofee already that Currie had not failed her. For a brief moment, when he looked away from her persecutor, John Currie caught her eyes and received her smile of pleased acknowledgment. And he was fool enough to feel that that smile was a reward, though he knew that he had not yet brought the business to an end. Here was a girl at any rate who could play the deuce with men of all creeds, degrees and colors.

For all that, he had sense enough to remember that for the moment the Chinese demanded all his attention. He gave the man "hands up!" in a quiet voice without a tremor in it and, although on the look-out for trickery, nodded at Talamera when Li instantly complied. Without haste or flurry the Chinese held up his hands. Currie stepped over the window sill into the room.

MR. LI never moved. He made no attempt to speak, not even when Currie handed Talamera his revolver, told her to cover the devil snake and press the trigger if the man made any show of resistance. Li must have known then, if he had not already realized it, that there was some collusion between these two, that Talamera had tricked him. That alone must have been gall and wormwood to his vanity.

Li's eyes narrowed when Lofee's wooden gag was placed between his teeth. As an additional precaution a strip torn from his long coat of Chifu silk was tied tightly over his lips, his nostrils being left free for him to breathe. And then he was bound hand and foot with the table napkins twisted tight as ropes, before Currie turned down the lamp and blew it out.

He heard Talamera's voice, lazy, soft and musical, though in the sudden darkness he could not at first see her. She spoke as before in her broken English. Though she was never at a loss for a word, she over accented her vowels.

"One day," she said, "I will think of the best way in which I can prove my gratitude. Just now it seems to me I owe you far too much. I understand what people mean when they talk of a white man. And you almost a stranger."

"Why did you send for me?" he asked.

"For two reasons," she replied. "I knew that I could rely upon you, and there was no one else."

"How could you know that I would come at your bidding? I knew you to be the confederate of swindlers. Had I not reason to suspect that this was another trap?"

"Every reason," she answered deliberately. "And yet, I thought that you would come."

"Mademoiselle," said he, "it looks as if you may have presumed too much."

"A woman's intuition," she said. "I knew, I liked you; and I had some reason to believe that you cared for me."

"That can have been nothing but mere guesswork," said the other. "You are to remember that I have only seen you three times, that I have only spoken to you once."

She came quite close to him and laid one of her hands upon his shoulder.

"Listen," she whispered, "I will be quite frank with you for once. You came to Li's house in the Boulevard de Rochambeau mainly because of me. You had seen us together and thought that we were friends; but that had been arranged by Vautour. Nor was it by chance that you saw me first. Do not think me vain, if I realized then that I had made the impression I intended to. My friend, I am used to it. These things do not excite me very much. I know the symptoms far too well."

"In other words," said Currie, "you confess yourself the decoy of this black bearded Frenchman who has twice tried to murder me? I take it your employer pays you well?"

By now he could see well enough to notice that she slowly shook her head.

"You do me a little injustice," she said. "Pierre is my master—in a thousand ways, a kind master. As for me, I am his slave. I am not ashamed to confess it."

"You!" he exclaimed. "The slave of any man!"

"Subjectively," she answered. "I have learned the right expression. Pierre is the master of my subjective mind. With him I do not care. Hypnotism is like a drug. I fear him; and yet I love him. He is not like other men—and that you know. He can be tender and gentle as a woman. He can also be terrible. Though I count myself as fortunate in being his, I tremble when I think of those he hates."

JOHN CURRIE was conscious of a sensation as if the very composition of his blood had changed. Jealousy, wrath and disappointment were mingled furiously together. At the same time, he was aware that he had now been saved from making a fool of himself, and his gratitude for that made his other sentiments illogical.

He cared nothing for the fact that Li, who lay at his full length upon the floor, could both hear and understand every word that passed between them. The immaculate Mr. Li had been put safely out of the way. The unknown Vautour was at that moment the only person in the world that really mattered.

"Who is this man?" Currie demanded hotly. "I have learned more about him than you think—more, perhaps, than you yourself may know."

She waited a moment before she answered.

"I ask but one thing," she said. "To help you as you have helped me. And I can do that in no better way than warn you against Vautour. He has friends and agents everywhere. You can never escape from him a third time. Let us leave this place without delay. Lofee has told me that everything is ready for my flight. And once you are safely away, leave China altogether. Go back to Singapore. That will give me time to explain things to Pierre, to make peace, if I can, between him and you."

"Then you refuse to answer my question?" said Currie. "You tell me nothing I want to know."

"Not now, at any rate," she took him up. "And besides, my friend, you say you know too much about him already. That is why I am frightened for you. But, come. Why should we waste time in talking when we are not yet out of danger?"

"There's little or no risk," said the other. "It would be more than the life of a servant is worth to interrupt Li's tête-à tête. The fool meant to win you tonight, if not by one method by another; and now he's trussed like a plucked fowl with time on his hands to repent."

"That is no reason why we should not go," she said. "It would be foolish to leave anything to chance. I shall not feel safe until my master has returned."

With those words she bent down over the helpless form of the Chinese where Currie could not see her.

"Did you hear what I said?" she laughed. "I speak to you who would have been my lover. But I was neither to be bought nor frightened. Wait until Vautour returns from the north. You should know him well enough. Neither your wealth nor your father will save you from his vengeance. Adieu. You are my devil snake no longer. If you are wise, we never meet again."

She rose quickly and went straight to the window, Currie following. Not until they had reached the little garden did Lofee venture forth from his hiding place.

"Plenty long time," he observed. "No like."

He took Talamera by the hand and set off at a kind of jog trot, his soft felt soled shoes making no sound upon the flagstones.

In a moment they had reached the place where the ladder stood against the inner *yamen* wall, the top of which they followed, crawling upon all fours in single file, lest they should be seen by any one who chanced to be awake. And when they came to the gable of the attic, where Currie had lain hidden for four days, they found themselves confronted with a difficulty. For the roof was not strong enough to bear the weight of all three at once; while Talamera could not climb down without assistance.

The girl eventually gained the roof with the help of her mantilla, the end of which was held by Currie on the wall. Though she must have been conscious of the fact that the beams of the attic were creaking and threatening to give way beneath even her weight, she showed neither timidity nor hesitation. She reached in safety the far end of the building, where she dropped to the top of the outer wall, where Lofee awaited her.

Along this wall the Honanese proceeded at the same jog trot, almost doubled in half, with his hands folded in front of him, until they were come to the lateral branch of the tree by means of which they had entered the *yamen*.

Thence they gained the wood outside the wall with no greater mishap than the tearing of Talamera's dress. For that the girl cared nothing. She was strong and supple as a panther, and was now elated by excitement and the joy of having outwitted the man who had persecuted her for weeks.

They passed through the *kiao-liang*, and thence took a path that led toward the west; and when the moon arose they found themselves upon the lowlands, intersected by innumerable waterways and canals, where the old bridges and memorial archways looked like phantoms in the gloom.

The Honanese had neglected nothing. He had carried out the girl's instructions to the letter. Talamera confessed to Currie that Lofee, like herself, was under the hypnotic influence of Vautour. Suggestion, it appeared, had made the Frenchman appear to his subjects almost in the light of a god—a personality at once relentless and considerate, a superman who was master of himself and all others who came his way.

THEY found a sampan awaiting them not far from a ruined pagoda that had been demolished at the time of the Taiping rebellion. On board, the three of them sat packed together under the curved matting roof above the bows, Talamera in the middle, with her strange cavaliers on either side of her. They were tired, hot and footsore, for they had hurried every yard of the way: and yet it was then that the girl told John Currie all he ever heard from her own lips of her adventures.

It was a tale, sordid in many ways, that evoked nothing within him but something of pathos and a genuine admiration for the way in which she had fended for herself. One thing, at any rate, he learned that was of use to him. She confessed that she had come to Vautour from the harem of Sultan Sleeman of Turak. And that gave him an inkling of the truth, that the Frenchman had found a safe asylum in the territory of an independent state, from which he had planned and supervised the revolt of Batu Lunga.

They came, an hour or so after daylight, to the great main waterway of Central and Northern China, and there they boarded the same *wupan* that had brought Lofee and Currie from Shanghai.

The planter slept throughout the late hours of the morning and then sat in the bows as the great square sailed craft glided northward. Little given as a rule to meditation, he could yet not help wondering at the strangeness of his fate. The girl lay asleep upon the open deck but a few feet away from him, her head resting upon a pillow of dried rushes. She seemed alike unconscious of the fierce rays of the sun, and the mingled smell on board of garlic, grease and tar. Apart from the fact that she looked even more beautiful than ever, he marveled at her endurance and her courage, the untutored philosophy with which she accepted the vicissitudes of fortune.

John Currie was lost in his thoughts when he saw approaching a large seagoing junk so broad in the beam that he predicted that the *laoban* of the *wupan* would have some difficulty in passing. The junk was headed southward, toward the city of Haining; and although she was still far away Currie could hear singing on board, the shrill notes of Chinese songs, accompanied by quaint one stringed instruments.

There was something in China—as he had already realized—that filled him with a sense of his own puny insignificance. A land that had been for centuries decaying, that was alive everywhere, in much the same way as putrification generates animalcula that are always restless and active. His thoughts were still of the girl who could be so self dependent, and above all self confident, in the midst of such surroundings, in a country without nerves, pity or sympathy, wherein semi-barbarism was masked by a crooked and complicated culture.

The whole place was like the vast crater of some dormant volcano that periodically burst forth in violent eruption. And even now those upon the approaching junk were like so many madmen. The old fashioned painted ship was like a little hell afloat. For there were half naked turbaned figures on the deck who sang in raucous voices, shouting in their own jarring, guttural language, while they brandished naked weapons. They were tall, apelike men, with skin more brown than yellow; men of the coolie class from the far distant north—the provinces of Chili and Shantung. Among them were one or two who wore the new modern uniform of the Cantonese Communist army; and in the peak of the ship was a figure dressed in white.

The two ships passed so close together that Currie could have leaped on board the junk. And Talamera still slept through it all, though the singing and shouting were almost deafening, and fierce men with coarse jeers and brutal oaths crowded at the bulwarks of the junk to behold the green eyed foreign devil who sat in the bows of the *wupan*.

And then it was that Currie saw and recognized the man in white. It was Vautour; and he held in his hand his ebony walking stick, while at his feet upon the deck lay the green carpet bag which was the only luggage he was ever known to have.

Almost at the same moment the Frenchman recognized the man whom he had tried to murder at Batu Lunga. He looked from Currie to the sleeping form of Talamera; and his face at once became that of a man possessed. For a moment he was inarticulate, as if insane. Then he came out with a loud shout in the Chinese language.

Immediately the junk swung round, until she lay athwart the canal, and hauled down her sails. Currie had turned to the *laoban* to tell him to make every effort to escape, when he saw that the man was frozen stiff with horror.

CHAPTER IX

INFERNO

A JUNKMAN by trade and a man of peace by natural inclination, the *laoban* knew river pirates when he saw them. And moreover, one glance had been enough to tell him that these ruffians were in league with the Canton rebels who were already marching north.

The worthy fellow had recovered sufficiently from his fright to let out a kind of screech, when, letting go the tiller and leaving his craft with its bows rammed home in the mud, he leaped overboard, with a few strokes reached the canal bank, and then set off running as if Yen Wang, the devil god, were at his heels.

Currie, left alone on board with Lofee and Talamera, was helpless to handle the *wupan*. For himself he might have escaped in the same manner as the *laoban*, though there were those on the junk who carried fire arms. But at such a crisis his sense of chivalry and some illogical impulse that he did not trouble to understand made him unwilling to leave the girl.

Though Talamera did but go back to the man whom she had said she loved, upon their short journey on the Grand Canal John Currie had allowed romance to get the better of him. He had seen Vautour; and his masculine vanity prompted him to believe that there was still a chance for him, a chance all the greater, since the girl had confessed to being under the hypnotic influence of the man from whom he meant to get her away.

Talamera was not awakened from her sleep until the junk had grated against the *wupan*, and some score of half naked, shouting devils came swarming over the low bulwarks like a pack of human wolves.

As for Lofee, the Honanese seemed in two minds what to do. Delighted at having found his master again, he saw that Vautour was in no mood to be greeted even by the faithful and heroic servant he believed himself to be. Nor did he like the look of the junk's company, all of whom were the type of men who use their swords without wasting time on questions.

Vautour himself came on board the *wupan* like a thunderbolt. Displaying remarkable activity for a man no longer young, he cleared the narrow strip of water that lay between the after decks of the two native craft; and he did this for no other reason than that it was the shortest way for him to reach John Currie.

He carried in his right hand his black ebony walking stick; and ignoring the planter for the moment, he pointed the ferrule of the walking stick straight at the heart of the girl.

That alarmed Currie no less than the glint of passionate hatred in those black, metallic eyes. Currie had made a movement forward, to throw himself between the two of them—an action that was not lost on Talamera—when at a quick order from the Frenchman he was seized and held by four powerful men, disarmed and his revolver and ammunition handed over to Vautour.

Vautour spoke in the English language, possibly because he intended Currie to understand what he said.

"The meaning of this?" he asked, pointing excitedly at the man he had made his prisoner.

She laughed, but it was not her old laughter. It was humor plainly forced, and she was white as death.

"You need not be afraid on his account," she answered. "False friends, Pierre, are often more to be feared than honest enemies. I warned you before that Li could not be trusted."

"I do not forget," he almost shouted. "And I know now it was a lie. I know that you spoke to this man, and many of the very words you used, that night when he came to Li's house in the boulevard."

She answered in a weak voice that was almost pleading.

"Pierre," she protested, "be reasonable! You are too blinded by jealousy to think. Li took me against my will to Kin-mun. Where should I be going now, northward on the Grand Canal, if we are not returning to Shanghai?"

"The Grand Canal leads everywhere," said the other. "With Li I am not concerned. If what you say is true, I shall settle with him later. How comes it that you are with this man? Answer me that."

She replied fearlessly—

"Because he is my friend."

"Your friend!" the Frenchman shrieked. "Your lover—the moment my back is turned!"

"I sent to him for help," she answered.

With his free hand Vautour smote himself upon the chest. The man was senseless with rage. His conduct, as well as his appearance was that of a raving madman.

"To him!" he cried. "Why not to me? Am I not your protector and your master?"

She laughed again, this time with greater confidence.

"You were five hundred miles away," she said.

He gesticulated frantically, waving his ebony stick in the air.

"What is five hundred miles to me?" he asked. "Am I not now upon my way to rescue you? And I discover by chance there is another to whom you prefer to trust your destiny!"

"Never, Pierre!" she began, but he cut her short.

"I'll teach this dog a lesson!" he snarled.

He came right up to Currie, and never in his life had the planter looked upon a face more terrible and evil, more cruelly insane and ingenious.

CURRIE had never before seen Vautour in the daylight. The man's skin was the color of greenish parchment. He had the complexion of a corpse; and the black sockets of his eyes were like those of a skull.

He wore no hat, and his thick, black curly hair was seen to be touched with gray. He now showed his teeth, like an angry dog, and those teeth were gleaming white against the blackness of his beard. But, if he looked both cadaverous and fierce, his eyes were venomous eyes that shone hard as coal black quartz.

"I have you now," said he. "I will show you that it would have been far better for you, had you not escaped from me at Batu Lunga, had those Tamil fools thrown you, as I told them, to the crocodiles."

The motley, disreputable crew of the junk stood around in a circle, gaping and curious, though unable to understand a word of what was said. They were wrinkled, weatherbeaten coolies with faces like apes. One or two wore the shabby, ill fitting uniforms of the Cantonese army, with their feet wrapped in bandages. Others had practically no clothes at all, save dirty loin cloths and faded turbans. One would have thought that no man alive could have kept in hand such a rough, disorderly crowd, men with the intelligence of savages and the passions of children.

And yet, Vautour rounded upon them like a fighting rat, jerking out a few guttural sentences in the Northern Chinese dialect.

He was obeyed upon the instant, as if they thought it more than their lives were worth to delay. The greater part of them attended to the junk, cleared her bows of the mud bank under the stone embankment and got her again safely under way, headed northward up the long canal. As for the four men who held Currie a prisoner, in obedience to the Frenchman's orders, howling and laughing, they dragged the planter along the deck, to hurl him neck and crop down a small companionway where there was a dark hole under the poop, which stood up above the main deck of the junk like that of an old Spanish galleon.

Currie found himself, in a narrow, evil smelling place to which the discomfort of the attic in the *yamen* of Kin-mun was as nothing. For here were four or five hideous women with their ugly naked children. The floor was littered with rubbish of all kinds—personal belongings, fishing tackle, rags of clothing and cooking utensils. Here, too, was every smell that the Far East can produce—the smoke of a charcoal fire still issuing from a firebox, the smell of sweat and opium, a great open barrel of some kind of rancid oil and a plague of busy flies.

There was not room enough for the planter to stand upright. He was obliged to remain in a half crouching position until Talamera, followed by Vautour, climbed down the short ladder from the deck. The Frenchman said nothing; but with a wave of a hand he cleared out the women and children who scuttled away from him up the ladder and on to the deck, like so many frightened chickens.

This black bearded man of mystery, by some means or other, had the power to make himself dreaded by every one he met. The fact that he was a foreigner seemed to make no difference. He was the master of every soul on board the junk.

"And now I teach you a lesson you would have been wise to have learnt before," he said. "You know something of this walking stick already—a simple device of my own, but effective on occasions. I am a stern schoolmaster who does not spare the rod; but we can find something better on board this ship to prove to you that you have been foolish to meddle in the affairs of Pierre Vautour."

Currie spoke for the first time.

"Am I allowed to say nothing in my own defense?" he asked.

Vautour shrugged his shoulders.

"I am my own witness," he replied. "I find you with Talamera. Understand," he shouted, "she belongs to me! Heart and soul and body, she is mine, to the end of my life or hers."

"And she is loyal to you," said Currie.

That had the effect of curbing for a moment the man's almost uncontrollable passion. Jealousy had made him deaf to reason.

"Is it not so," he asked, "that you are in love with her? I am the more likely to get at the truth, if I tell you that in any case you are about to die."

"As I can not explain my own feelings to myself," said the other, "I am unable to do so to you. I can but give you the advice you have given me, and ask you to mind your own affairs. But I can tell you this," he went on, "with all the plain speaking you seem to want. In your absence she was kidnapped by Li, and I rescued her willingly, at her own request."

"Lofee tells me that is so," Vautour replied. "But you would never have risked your life for a girl about whom you cared nothing. Would you ask me to believe that you did not intend to make every effort to keep her away from me? Answer me that!"

CURRIE hesitated before he spoke. He was determined not to allow the personality of this man to overpower him.

"There again," said he, "I do not know."

Vautour came out with a string of oaths in French. His ungovernable mood had physically affected him so strangely that there was actually foam upon his lips, white froth caught in the black hairs of his mustache and beard. Trembling with agitation he turned sharp to Talamera.

"How much does this man mean to you?" he demanded.

"Less than you, my master," she replied. "Far less."

"I do not believe it," said he, turning away from her as in disgust. "But, when I and my friends have finished with him, he will be worth nothing but food for rats."

He gripped Talamera so roughly by an

arm that Currie saw her wince in pain. With brutal roughness he dragged her after him up the steps, and on deck hurried here and there, so restless that he could not keep still a moment, rapping out short breathless orders in Chinese to men who were palpably afraid of him.

He had now the manner of a man suffering from hysteria. His nerves were so disordered that he was like a wild beast that prowled its cage. He wandered from one end of the ship to the other, supervising every detail of the diabolical scheme that he proposed to carry out.

And in the meantime John Currie was left in the hold, bound hand and foot. No one else was allowed to enter the place. He was given neither food nor water. Left to his own thoughts, he could never doubt for a moment his last hour was come.

As the evening drew on the hold became quite dark and the foul smells seemed to become more offensive than ever. The junk still glided northward upon the smooth water of the great canal. Under full canvas she swept past the old memorial archways that had witnessed in the distant past scenes every bit as terrible as the deviltry of Pierre Vautour.

It must have been as late as ten o'clock at night when they took Currie to the deck, where an open fire was burning amidships illuminating a ring of savage, eager faces. No human expression can be more dreadful than that of a Chinese about to witness torture. The Mongol's love of cruelty, his incapacity to feel for others, the ingenious barbarities that he has devised throughout the centuries, make him far more terrible than any untutored Indian or savage.

Vautour knew China as he knew the world; and knowing China, he was acquainted with the greatest deviltries that had ever been perpetrated within the forbidden city itself or the *yamens* of the magistrate and prefect. He had the genius to approve and to adapt.

Currie, as yet ignorant of his doom, felt his heart fail him at the sight of those evil faces in the firelight, hungry for excitement. He looked about him in vain for Talamera. He could see her nowhere. And somehow or other that seemed the bitterest blow of all. It looked as if the girl had deserted him at the eleventh hour.

They tore his clothes from off his back, stripping him to the waist. And then the sail was lowered and he was bound with his back to the mast. He heard the anchors weighed both fore and aft, and saw that the junk lay moored but a few yards from the western bank of the canal.

All that followed seemed to the doomed man an interminable and ghastly process. As he watched the men who worked busily under the supervision of that black bearded madman, the truth dawned upon him by degrees and he was affected by the feeling of sickness of one about to faint.

They had procured from somewhere on board the junk a long, empty barrel, the open end of which had been cut into a curve. The object of this curve was presently apparent, for it enabled the end of a barrel to be pressed tightly against the naked stomach of the unfortunate victim who was securely tied to the mast. The barrel itself was divided into two compartments, each with an airhole at the top. In the compartment at the closed end of the barrel was placed a charcoal fire in a small brazier which could be fanned by means of a pair of bellows inserted into a bunghole.

CURRIE at first supposed that he was about to be burned alive in a manner so fiendish that the agony would be continuous and slow. He knew that Chinese torturers were past masters in the art of keeping their victims alive. When the barrel was made fast against his body by means of a rope he was immediately conscious of the heat of the fire at the other end of it, though the man with the bellows had not yet begun to blow the heated air towards his unprotected skin. Unaware as yet of the exact nature of his purgatory, he had time to take in his surroundings. In much the same manner as a condemned criminal takes notice of the most insignificant details, he noted every aspect of the infernal scene in which he himself was the principal figure. And this he did on purpose, though with conscious effort, hoping thereby to bolster up his courage, to keep in reserve what fortitude he had.

He saw the round China moon, hanging low and pale above the ling gardens and the pollard mulberry trees. A little way down the canal stood an old ruined joss house; moss grown steps and crumbled walls beyond, enclosing a stone platform where had once stood the local Taoist god. The ruins stood there in the moonlight so still and peaceful that they were yet sacred precincts, while here and there the standing water on the lowlands was like sheets of polished silver.

As far as Currie could make out no one was abroad on either side of the canal. Silence everywhere, peace and rest in the balmy semi-tropical night, everywhere but on board that wooden, painted hell.

Around the red fire that burned upon the open deck were devils incarnate, men worse than relentless, for they gloated in brutality. And in the midst of them, the greatest fiend of all, that black bearded Satan with skin like parchment, the eyes of a rattlesnake and a voice soft and low as a woman's. He stood there quietly giving his orders. Unlike the rest of them, calm and businesslike, anticipating nothing. He had the manner of a man whose determination was fixed, who was neither triumphant nor apprehensive.

He satisfied himself that the rope was taut that bound the barrel to the victim. And at that he nodded as if he approved and beckoned to a man who came forward with a cage of rats. These rats had been caught throughout the day on board the junk itself. Frozen with horror as he was, with the same unaccountable desire to study details, John Currie counted seven rats in all.

He had had a glimpse of the inside of the barrel when it was being placed against his body; and he had seen that the two compartments were divided one from another by meshed wire. He observed now a kind of trapdoor upon hinges at the top of the barrel. This was now open; and the live rats were shot down into the compartment next to Currie's naked body. And he realized what Vautour had meant when the man had said that it would have been far better for the planter if the Tamil coolies had hurled him insensible to the crocodiles in the little weed grown river that flowed through the Batu Lunga estate.

Currie remembered now that he had heard of this deviltry before. By means of the bellows the scalding air from the charcoal fire could be forced into the farther compartment of the barrel, with the result that the scorched and terrified rats would furiously endeavor to fight their way to freedom through the soft flesh of the tormented man.

The shock of the truth had a paralyzing effect upon the victim. Upon a sudden it was as if his senses had ceased to function. He could see nothing but a kind of fog surrounding him, in the midst of which was a blurred, increasing, purple glow. He was vaguely conscious of a kind of turmoil that might have been the excited cries of his persecutors. Somehow or other, in the mist, with extraordinary clarity, if for no longer than a few seconds, he saw the hard, shining eyes of Pierre Vautour.

Then he felt as if his vitals were being torn out. He gave vent to one piercing shriek and for a moment was conscious of nothing, until there came a sudden sense of relief from pain and he saw Talamera. She was standing quite close to him—snow white in the face, shivering as from cold. In her right hand was a knife.

CHAPTER X

MOLOCH

JOHN CURRIE, suddenly released from such acute, violent torment, experienced something of the sensation of a man who awakens in broad daylight from a nightmare. He could account for nothing. The Chinese and Vautour were gone.

There was no one near him but Talamera, who thrust into his hand his own revolver.

"Take that!" she cried. "It's loaded. Swim to the bank and run for your life!"

He was too dazed to obey, even to answer. He stared first at her and then at a rat that scurried across the bloodstained, dirty deck. Then he looked again at her.

A glow, like a great, flaming halo, was spread forth on every side of her. She stood framed in shining gold, like an angel or a saint, this halfcaste light o' love of the Eastern Isles.

"Talamera!" he gasped. "Tell me what has happened?"

She clasped her hands together and, with a pale expression of intense anxiety, glanced towards the after end of the junk. "There's no time now," she said in a breathless voice. "Oh, it was all so easy! They were all here to see you tortured. Women, and even children, came to see your death. There was a cask of oil in the hold. I upset it and threw a match down. The junk's on fire!"

He had recognized the truth of that even before she told him, for the flames were spreading rapidly. From a few feet they shot upward almost to the height of the mast, which sent the frenzied and panic stricken crew racing for safety to the other end of the ship.

The girl half dragged Currie to the wooden bulwarks. The blood was streaming down his legs, though he felt but little pain.

"Go!" she cried again. "Save yourself, while you have time. They'll never find you in the darkness."

He had less than a second in which to ask her the one question that was uppermost in his mind, that he now knew meant so much to him.

"Come with me!" he exclaimed. "It is I who now owe everything to you. Give me a chance of paying you back!"

She stiffened. She stood rigid, with her arms at her sides, and would have been like a graven image had she not slowly shaken her head.

"Monsieur, it is not possible," she said. "Vautour was right. Heart and soul and body, I am his."

Visions in the red smoke of the yellow faces of frightened and infuriated men, of the flash of sword and knife, brought Currie to his senses. If Talamera would not come with him, he must go alone. He had now but a moment in which to save his life. He went overboard into the muddy water of the canal, with his revolver between his teeth. His lacerated body pained him for the first time as he struck the water, and yet he had the free use of his muscles.

A few strokes, and he touched ground on the soft, slimy mud and scrambled up the steep embankment, fortunately for him, at a place where the tow path was buried in the shade of a clump of trees.

The fire was like a raging furnace. Looking back, he could see a crowd of excited figures in the bows of the junk. They were but shadowy forms in the midst of the red smoke, but among them he could recognize Vautour.

As far as Currie could make out, they were endeavoring to lower a light sampan into which already they had thrown many of their personal belongings. That they were too panic stricken to do the job expeditiously was obvious; they had succeeded in tangling the tackle in the bamboo davits.

Currie stayed to see no more, but rushed for the cover of a clump of trees, growing upon higher ground not far away. By the time he had reached that, he was compelled to stop, because his heart was beating like a hammer. Loss of blood had begun to affect him and he was obliged to sit down and take one or two deep breaths to prevent himself from fainting.

He could see the long course of the canal quite plainly for a great distance, the muddy water golden in the light of the conflagration. He was amazed to see that people were everywhere. Though there was no native village in sight, the blue coated figures of innumerable Chinese peasants had appeared as by a miracle from out of the ground. From all directions they were hurrying toward the fire, following paths across the rice fields, jumping high into the air and shouting to one another in delight.

THE SAMPAN, packed with women and children from stem to stern, had by now been lowered from the junk. Most of the crew had already swum ashore.

Led by Vautour, with whom was Talamera, they made for the ruined joss house. Vautour was dragging the girl by an arm. Holding one of her wrists, he went forward with long strides, with his peculiar limping gait and his round shouldered stoop. Currie saw that once or twice the girl resisted him, only to be jerked forward with brutal violence.

The fugitive was no longer safe, since the ruins of the Taoist temple were not more than a hundred yards away from him. However, he knew that a few minutes must elapse before he was capable of continuing his flight. He decided to remain where he was and rest awhile. There was some comfort in the reflection that he was more or less hidden where he was, while the Chinese were too infuriated and alarmed at the disaster that had befallen them to have time to think of him.

Even as he sat there amid the thickets under the trees, a small field rat appeared in front of him and sat up upon its hind legs in a patch of moonlight. The very sight of the animal almost made John Currie sick. Recollection of the terrible fate from which he had so narrowly escaped sent a cold shiver down his back.

That took his mind to his own physical hurts. As far as he could discover, he had suffered no serious injury, though the skin had been scratched deep and the flesh badly lacerated in wounds that sooner or later were certain to become septic. With his blood impoverished by malarial fever, he had come to the conclusion that he was doomed to die of blood poisoning, when his ears were deafened by one long, piercing shriek.

He sat up, stiff and attentive, unable for a moment to account for what he had heard. And it was not until the same shriek was repeated that he remembered —Talamera.

He sprang to his feet and stood swaying for a moment. She was down there, brave, defenseless girl, in the hands of a man who was a devil incarnate, mad with jealousy, a human bird of prey. Somewhere within the shattered moss grown walls of that ancient shrine, Vautour, the madman, was on fire with his revenge.

John Currie had no longer any thought for himself. Better fall like a man in a vain attempt to save the girl who had sacrificed so much for him than die by inches, poisoned by vermin. He held in his hand the revolver she had given him, that she had said was loaded; and forgetful of his weakness, his wounds and the pain he suffered, he dashed down the slope toward the joss house by the canal.

Not looking where he went, he floundered deep into the liquid mud of a paddy field, to drag himself out again, blood to the waist, mud to the feet, his hair disheveled, his eyes wild. Thus, like a figure half tragedy, half fun, he took the steps of the old temple at a bound and sprang upon the only vantage point that he could see—the stone plinth where once had stood, to receive the offerings of simple minded, superstitious peasants, the local Taoist deity.

Though the stone plinth was no more than one or two feet high, it gave him the sense of superiority he wanted. And besides, his frame of mind was at that moment so rash and desperate that he would have feared nothing in the universe. It was enough for him that he had a loaded firearm in his hand and was prepared to account for a living man with every round in the chambers.

The fire of the blazing wooden junk brightly illumined the interior of the roofless joss house, the walls of which were in places not more than a few feet high. John Currie saw before him and below him the wrinkled, apelike faces of the northern coolies. He saw, too, that many of them had thrown away their swords.

TO HIS surprise he was received with no hostile demonstration; neither threats nor imprecations were hurled at him. They might not have recognized the man for whom a few moments before they had assembled to see tortured. All eyes were fixed upon the central figure upon the weed grown pavement of the joss house.

That man was Vautour, who looked more terrible than he had ever seemed before. A tragic spectacle, he stood horror stricken, ashen, like a corpse. His eyes were staring—white rims around those black and shining irises. His lips were parted, and the right hand that held the ebony walking stick was seen to be trembling violently. That was the only movement about him. The rest of him was frozen. His white face touched with the red of the conflagration, he stood gazing at the ground upon which lay, face downward, the lifeless figure of a girl about whose slender body was wrapped a black mantilla.

In the sweating atmosphere, the breathless air, the heat of the fire and the hot dampness of the *fou*, Currie experienced a sensation as if the blood in his arteries had turned to ice. In a flash he realized the truth, that Talamera had been murdered. When he saw the shining, slender blade of Vautour's steel stiletto protruding from the ferrule of the ebony walking stick, it was as if something had clutched at his own heart.

He knew then, too late, that he had really loved this girl. The vain thought passed through his mind that, some day and somehow, he might have won her. Such a hope flashed like a meteor and was gone. It vanished into despair and emptiness at the sight before him.

Vautour stood not seven yards away from him. A bird of prey no longer, the man was at John Currie's mercy.

The planter pressed the trigger of his revolver. The report echoed loud amid the old sacred walls. Vautour gave no cry. The ebony stick fell from his hand and he came down upon his face, to lie with his body across that of Talamera.

Currie did not consider the consequences of his action. Had he done so, in view of the fact that he was outnumbered in that place by almost twenty to one, it would have seemed that Vautour would be immediately avenged.

And such a conjecture would have been wide of the mark. Human psychology in moments of emergency takes unexpected turns. Alarmed already, the Chinese became even more panic stricken at the sight of the Frenchman's sudden downfall, at the manner in which the man they had so dreaded had surrendered to his enemy. They realized, too, that, armed as they were with swords and knives, they were at the mercy of Currie's revolver. The eager ferocity with which they had assembled to witness a helpless man in torture had gone out of them. There was not one of their number who was willing to show fight.

They drew back in a body to the head of the stone steps, the former entrance to the temple. Curiosity held them, some seeking cover, others watching the man who was the undoubted master of the situation, as birds watch the movements of a cat.

Ready to take to their heels at a moment's notice, they saw Vautour raise himself upon an elbow, draw back a little and give vent to a groan. It was a sound expressive of far more than physical pain, of the very depths of mental agony. Very gently his thin, clawlike hands clutched the shoulders of that slender, lifeless body.

He lifted her a little and, still holding her shoulders, gazed for a long time into her bloodless face. Then he groaned again and buried his face in his hands. He might have been praying, or weeping—it was impossible to say which.

He was aroused to consciousness by the sound of Currie's voice, by one word uttered with all the hatred of a simple, honest man.

"Murderer!"

He looked up. He looked straight at Currie who was now kneeling on the ground quite close to him on the other side of Talamera's body.

The Frenchman said nothing. He just shook his head like one half dazed and utterly hopeless.

The coolies had drawn nearer. They were not hostile—only inquisitive and still afraid. Among them were many peasants who had come from the rice-fields and the ling gardens. Beyond the ruined walls Currie could see a crowd upon the river bank, congregated before the fire of the still burning junk, now destroyed almost to the waterline.

AT LAST Vautour spoke. His voice was hollow, hoarse. He spoke without looking at Currie, without moving his eyes from the pale face of the girl he had so passionately loved.

"Mad!" he exclaimed. "I must have been mad! Oh, God, what have I done!"

Currie tried in vain to feel the beat of her heart.

"Is she dead?" he asked. "Are you sure of it?"

"Dead," said the other. "And I have killed her. Dead!"

At that word, reiterated even once again by the Frenchman, for the moment all enmity vanished between these two. Hatred, horror, even mistrust, were gone. They shared a common sorrow, more intense, perhaps, in the one, but no less sincere in the other. If this girl had been ready to give Vautour her life, she had died for Currie.

Currie himself realized that condemnation would be useless. The man—as he had said—was mad. His was the mentality that belonged to the borderland of insanity and crime.

The victim all his life of an intensely passionate and revengeful nature, Vautour, like Othello, had swung round from insensate rage to the bitterest remorse. All that night he could not bring himself to leave the body of the girl. He sat there, weeping and groaning and at times shaking his clenched fists at the stars above him, bursting forth into breathless, incoherent imprecations.

The junk burnt to the water level and lay a mass of charred wood against the stone embankment of the Grand Canal. The coolies vanished, finding what shelter they could in the villages of the ling farmers. The moon went down; and a white mist arose upon the lowlands with the dawn.

Vautour had been seriously wounded; but there was a chance that the injury would not prove fatal, if he received due medical attention. Currie's bullet had smashed through his ribs, slightly lacerating his right lung. He had bled a little from the mouth, especially when he tried to walk. When he left the temple, at about nine o'clock in the morning, he did so almost doubled in half, with one arm around the neck of the planter upon whom he leaned heavily for support.

Before then, with the help of some peasants, they had buried Talamera in a gave among the *kiao-liang*, by the old Taoist shrine where she had breathed her last. And when they had hailed a passing *wupan* to take them northward to the Yangtze, Vautour lay upon the deck, stretched at his full length upon his back, with his arms crossed upon his chest, like a graven figure on a tomb.

He had come to the end of all his activities and schemes. And he knew it. He wanted nothing but to confess, to make a clean breast of everything. He declared to Currie that he would now even welcome the hangman's rope.

CHAPTER XI

VAUTOUR

IT WAS by moonlight, not far from where the old Grand Canal loses itself in the wide yellow waters of the Yangtze, that John Currie listened to the story of Vautour.

The man was something of a casuist, with many plausible and cold blooded theories that were beyond argument or proof. He began by protesting that no one can be blamed for any so called sin. As the kleptomaniac found it impossible not to steal, so the so called honest man found it just as hard to do so. He even compared the moral sense to the coloring of the eyes; there might be gray or brown coloring matter, so he said, or there might be none at all. It was just how Nature shaped us; for he had long since ceased to believe in God.

Thus he began, seated in the bows of the *wupan*, his back propped against a bundle of fodder and his thin hands upon his knees. He talked throughout as if to himself, staring straight in front of him at the moonlight on the water, with never even a glance at the lights of near-by ships, when the *wupan* swung before the wind into the mouth of the Woosung.

He had been born forty-seven years before in the department of Lande in southern France. His parents were of an old Gasçon family of the name of Dumesnil; proud and wealthy and honored in the neighborhood.

These were circumstances that had not provided André Dumesnil, who afterwards changed his name to Pierre Vautour, with a sense of right and wrong. According to him, there was no reason why they should. Early in his youth, he had realized that he was specially gifted to pursue the career of crime. Even then he had traveled extensively; he was a fluent linguist; he combined unusual business capacities with a genius for organization and an active, imaginative mind.

For years he had been a forger, clever enough to escape conviction and amass a fortune. He had delighted in the enjoyment of many personalities, which, as it were, gave a zest to life and afforded him the satisfaction of knowing that he was cleverer than the law.

But at last he had failed. He had been betrayed by a shred of circumstantial evidence that no one could have foreseen, that might never have occurred again in fifty lifetimes. His trial, his vigorous defense of himself, his fight for freedom, were passed over in a few words. And then he came to the sentence passed upon him by the judge.

He spoke no longer with the same easy flow of words, in the same calm, emotionless voice. The recollection of what he had suffered, his deep seated resentment at what went by the name of justice in the land of his birth caused his voice to tremble.

He related how he and his accomplice, who was no more than his tool, had been sentenced to *traveaux forcés* in the penal settlement of New Caledonia, and how they had been detained before deportation in the Island of Ré. And then, a prison hulk, a life that he described as no better than that of a galley slave, in a tropical and pestilential climate. His companion, who was his only friend, had died under the harshness of the treatment they received. He spoke of brutal jailers, of fevered, sleepless nights, of toil without hope or respite, that crushed the souls out of human beings—to bring them down almost to the level of brute beasts.

He had escaped, because he was more cunning and courageous than the others, and because he had the vitality of a cat, and had conceived a new object in life. He found his way to Papua and thence to Java. For years he lived on his wits in the Far East, first in one place, then in another.

HE HAD become obsessed by an unquenchable hatred of the whole European race. He had found far better friends, he declared, among Kanakas, Chinese and Malays than he had ever known in his own country. With infinite patience, year by year, and step by step, he had laid the foundations of a society whose object was to oust the white man from the East.

The aftermath of the Russian Revolution, the spread of communism from Bombay to Pekin, was all to the advantage of his scheming. With Bolshevist agents and labor delegates active everywhere, he found his task comparatively easy. His former avarice returned. He would be revenged upon mankind—and at the same time enrich himself.

For five years he had been busily employed, never for long in the same place, flying like the bird of prey he so resembled, from the Straits of Malacca to the

Gulf of Chili. And everywhere he went was raised the red flag of revolt, the rebellion of the Asiatic against the European. The Batu Lunga estate was not alone among the prosperous business concerns that he had wrecked.

The opportunities these disorders afforded him of making his own fortune had been an afterthought. When the shares of the companies he had ruined were below par, he found no difficulty in collecting around him a ring of unscrupulous native financiers, who were willing to profit by Vautour's activities. These men included Li-tsao-yen and his son, several wealthy Cantonese merchants and the Sultan of Turak. It was but necessary to find a broker to act for them, who would register the shares in several fictitious names; and such a man was forthcoming in de Sousa-Fink, who hated the English like poison, since in Singapore he was not admitted into the society to which he thought he had a right to belong.

No one but a man of Vautour's energy and personality could have carried out the work. He had always made it a principle to get a first hand knowledge of every enterprise he proposed to attack. He had learned that John Currie had for long been the mainstay of the Batu Lunga rubber estate; and on that account, when he met him for the first time in Durgâ's shrine in the jungle, he had done his best to murder him.

The very fact that Currie had escaped with his life on that occasion had made him a menace to Vautour. No one else had ever seen the bird of prey at work; no one else had ever suspected for a moment that a white man was concerned in these disorders. Vautour was a man who took no greater risks than he must. He determined therefore to remove John Currie from his path.

THE REST of the story Currie himself knew. Vautour blamed himself. He had done wrong to give so much of his life to a woman.

And yet, he had relied often upon Talamera; and he had thought that he could always trust her. There were soft places, he supposed, in every woman's heart; but until he had met Talamera in the palace of Turak, he had never dreamed for a moment there was a soft place in his own.

Yet, such was the case. With the death of that girl, murdered by his own hands, it was as if the very bottom had gone out of his life. His grand project was as nothing; the fire of revenge had been suddenly extinguished; life itself was worthless.

"I surrender," said he, "not because I am a beaten man, but because it is my wish. Were I willing to do so, I could continue with my work. And I should succeed. In course of time I could ruin every white man on the coast, be he English, American, French or Portuguese. I could bring something into this country more formidable and lasting than the yellow peril of which men were once wont to speak. But I have finished!" he ended. "My course is run."

He had held out a hand, with its claw-like fingers clutched, as if he had meant to grasp something invisible but accessible. He now let that hand drop listlessly to his side and sat staring straight in front of him, his white face like death in the light of the China moon.

There were lights upon the river—green, red and white; the swaying light of oil paper sampan lanterns and fires in villages along the low lying coast. Now and again the silence was broken by the shriek of the siren some ship standing out toward the foggy sea, upon the miles wide estuary of the great sacred river. Ahead of them to the southwest was a glow in the sky above the lights of the great treaty port, the London and Paris of the East.

At last John Currie spoke.

"Your theories are worth nothing," he observed. "Whether crime be a matter of choice or a disease, those who oppose civilization and morality must pay for it. In Shanghai I hand you over to justice."

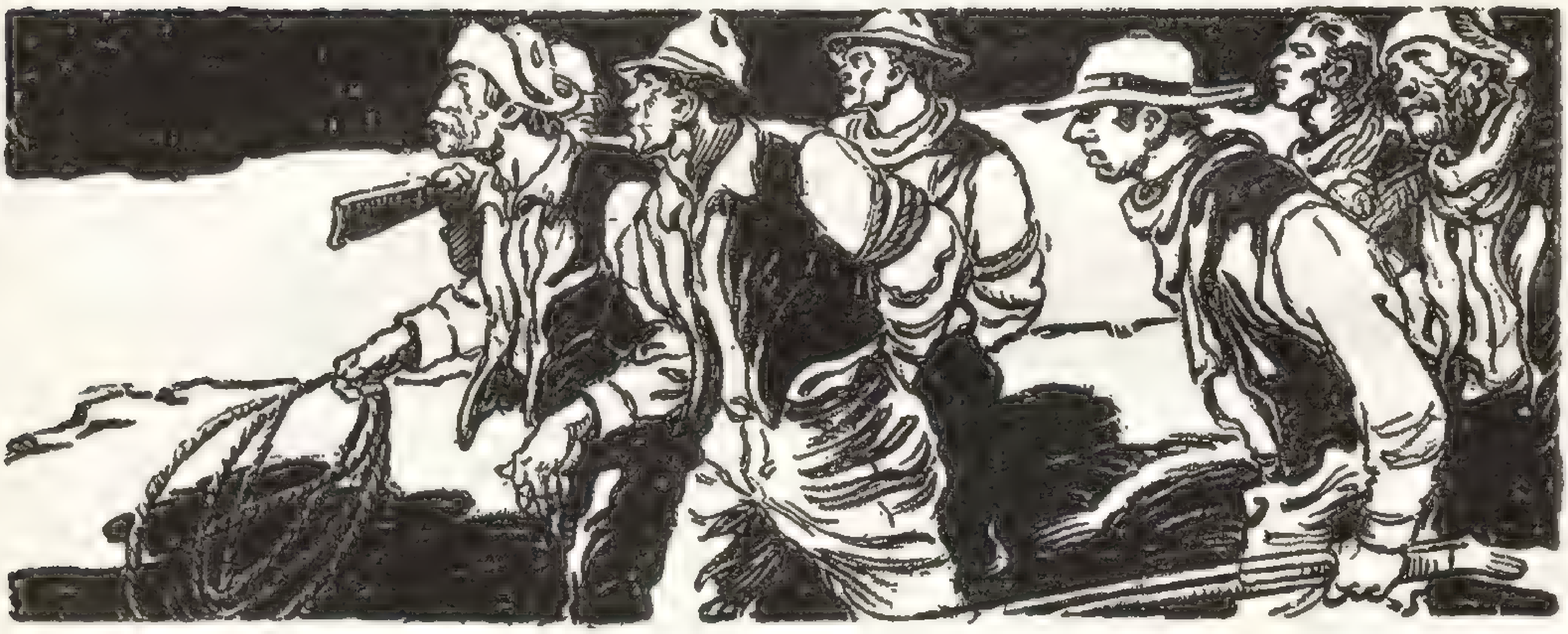
Upon Vautour's thin face the ghost of a smile was visible.

"I think not," said he. "I am dying now. To the end I defy manmade laws. I am going back—to Talamera."

A Night Lesson for the Bullies and Red Shirts

THE COMMITTEE

By Raymond S. Spears



CHARLIE CARPER, Dan Molish and Dud Lucken began to drink one evening early, and by eleven o'clock they were "going good" as they wandered around Buckshot in a whooping, shooting, bullying mood. They walked into the front doors of saloons, patronized the bar—all the minor ones free of charge—and then, having broken some glassware, shot out some lights and whooped a few times, they considered their visit done up brown and moved on.

Just as a matter of course, Buckshot was shot up every once in a while. It stood to reason rough men had to stretch according to their exuberance. Carper, Molish and Lucken cuffed a man here, talked rough there, and then found a genuine tenderfoot limping along the street—a boy who had just arrived at midnight out of the desolate trail from the Fort on the Missouri.

"Hi-i-i!" Carper yelled, and he herded the youth into the Flower Bush for purposes of entertainment.

The boy was staggering, his tongue was swollen, his lips cracked; his eyes were bulging with weariness, while his every step left a footprint in red. He was so funny the three shot at his toes to make him dance—a favorite stunt of the strong bad-men of the West Slope diggings.

The victim shook the film of misery from his eyes. He did not lift his feet from the floor—which was insulting. Instead, he turned to look at each of his tormenters undaunted, though he staggered as he gathered himself for what was surely coming.

A bullet creased his right ankle, another nicked the end of his left little toe and a third went wide but glanced on a hard knot, hitting a miner in the shoulder. This was a great joke. In the diversion thus created the youth on the instant mustered his strength, whipped out a sheath-knife and with one swipe of the ten-inch blade cut Molish half in two.

Carper and Lucken, savagely indignant at this resistance, shot at the knife-wielder, and he fell. Molish was carried to a bunk where, in spite of a surgeon's care, he died a few hours later, surrounded by swaggering, boisterous admirers who lauded the spunk and indifference with which the bully met his fate.

The crowd thought the stranger was dead, but one of the girls noticed that the victim of the forced dance had collapsed in a faint rather than from mortal wounds. She dragged him across the floor, leaving a trail of blood from bullet creases, and carried him to her own hutch on the side-hill, there to nourish, cherish and urge him to a stalwart manhood. And as long as she lived she was grateful for the inspiration she had followed, for it gave her a good husband and a reputable future.

An exaggerated report of the affair spread around. It was said bullies had attacked and shot an Eastern gentleman. It struck the conservative business elements in Buckshot that such an affair was bad for the reputation of the region.

Down in the Bachelor's Retreat, the unique saloon and gambling den where ladies were positively not allowed, Bill Dayton was sober. Deck, of Landers and Deck, merchants, was angry because the three gunmen had come into his store to buy ammunition on tick, to disturb the quiet and peace—and then shot holes in the shining tinware, crockery and fabric bolts. A dozen others present in the saloon were in bad humor, for the boisterous three made it unsafe for them to retire to their own shacks, lest they be visited and abused.

"He was just a boy," Frank Lavell reported. "I saw them making him dance over in the Flower Bush, and he cut Molish in self-defense."

"Pity he didn't cut Carper and Lucken, too. Ought to all die, shooting promiscuous that way," Deck exclaimed angrily. "They shot us up and hung us up for fifteen or twenty dollars' worth of stuff. I'm sick of it."

"That's me, too," Dayton added. "This town's rough. There's no one here to keep peace, no government or anything. Suppose we go down and hang Charlie and Lucken, for an example?"

"Good idea!" the others approved. "Let's!"

"Notice which way they went, Lavell?" Deck inquired.

"They was kinda off to one side," Lavell replied. "Seein' Molish opened up wide thataway—it kind of sobered them."

"They'll probably sneak off to sober up complete," another suggested. "Let's go down and find out where they've holed in."

Accordingly, the two spies, Lavell and Tom Lurks, strolled down town. Sure enough, they had luck. They saw Lucken and Carper drinking alone in the Night Cap, a small unpopular alley saloon, and then followed them to their rag-shack brush-heap of a camp hardly a hundred yards from the Bachelor's Retreat. In three minutes they reported the retirement to rest of the two bullies.

"All right, boys," Bill Dayton approved the success of the spying expedition, "we'd better do this up right. No need of making a big row about it. I'll go up with Deck, Lurks, and a coupla others and draw them out. Rest of you hang back. Better wrap something over your faces."

The five accordingly led the way. Dayton walked naturally, scuffling in the gravel and rattling the stones. The other four circled quietly and came down from the sides of the shack-camp.

"Oh, boys!" Dayton called softly.

Instantly, the candle light within was blown out, but a fire in a sandbox glared and flickered, casting red reflections and dark shadows on the cloth roof and walls.

"S'all right!" Dayton said, "this is Bill Dayton. There's trouble breaking—thought I'd better let ye know!"

"What's 'at? What's 'at?" Lucken asked, hoarsely. "They ain't no hard feelin's, is they?"

"'Fraid so!" Dayton replied. "Thought I'd better let you know. Hell to pay, all right!"

Lucken and Carper crawled out of their hovel on their hands and knees, to get the news. As they rose to their feet revolvers were poked into their backs and sides. Their own weapons were removed from their belts.

"My God, boys," Carper gasped, "what's this?"

"You're too rough on strangers," was the grim reply. "You shot up the Deck and Landers place, too. You can have your fun in the saloons, but you'll leave peaceable people alone after this."

"Yes, sir, Bill—yes, sir!" Lucken's voice trembled. "Course—what you say—"

"Wha—what you going to do to us, boys? You ain't going to—" Carper gasped, as he saw the others coming, and he felt his elbows drawn back by a stout thong which looped and fastened them.

"Better be praying while you go," Dayton answered grimly.

The two began to whimper, begging, promising anything, pleading with the committee to forgive them. They made so much noise that gags were unceremoniously lashed into their mouths, a small cedar knot in one's mouth, a piece of old cap in the other.

Making no noise save that of scuffling feet, the party moved swiftly along a back alley, around to the other side of the town. There a new stable was being built for the stagecoach company. The roof rafters were in place and the beams of the up stairs, or garret, had been laid.

"Looks jes' like it was made for it!" somebody remarked as they entered the dark of this cavernous place.

"Looks like!" another remarked, as a cat-like climb up the walls and along the top of one of the beams was followed by the toss up of a line; another rope followed.

"Take two turns around," Dayton said. "Make the knots tight!"

"I used to be a sailor!" came the answer.

Hardly five minutes passed. Then they were ready. A half-log had been raised about four feet high on two short ends. On this stout timber the two wretched and astonished scoundrels stood, with ropes of short staging around their necks.

"Careful, you two—ye'll fall off!" somebody warned. "I'm lettin' go!"

"Ready, Pat?" Dayton asked. "You Pete?"

"All set."

"Jump then!"

The two who had stood beside the men on the improvised platform leaped to the ground. At either end were men, with lines around the upright long chunks.

"Let go!" Dayton ordered, and the chunks were jerked from under. The half-log dropped with a thud and the lodgepole pine rafter over-head sprung up and down from the bounding of the weights beneath.

The committee of law and order stood around a while, some of them smoking pipes vigorously, others chewing tobacco noisily, their heavy breathing loud in the darkness. Overhead the stars shone like gems. They could hear in town the reverberations of the dance-hall music, the pound of the heavy-foot dancers, the occasional yelps of enthusiasts.

Presently Dayton remarked—

"All right, boys; now we'll spread out—I'm thirsty!"

Accordingly the committee started, but some one objected.

"They won't nobody know why we done it!"

"That's so," another admitted. "Better poster 'em!"

"What'll we say?"

"Abusing a stranger!"

"Disturbing the peace!"

"Interfering with business!"

"Being rough," Dayton's voice suggested. "That'll cover it. They'll know what this means. I'll write it!"

Then the group broke up, separating and entering various saloons on their way to their respective bunks. No one had noticed them, heard them, known what they were about.

In the morning, the stable-building mechanics came with the first light of the sun, some wearily, having been up nearly all night, and some with the zest resulting from a good sleep. They came stretching and picking their teeth, talking with one another. They removed their coats or rolled up their sleeves in preparation for the long day ahead. They moved slowly, methodically, nearly oblivious to all but their own affairs, knocking the ashes out of a pipe or taking a fresh chew of tobacco. And so Tim Murphy, glancing over his shoulder to give a partner some of his remarks, stepped through the doorway. Then he looked ahead, to see where he was going.

"Howly Chrustmus!" he yelped. "Look what's here!"

One of the builders had been on the job the previous night. He was astonished with the others. There hung the two victims, with a piece of split board puncheon tied across Carper's breast. It read:

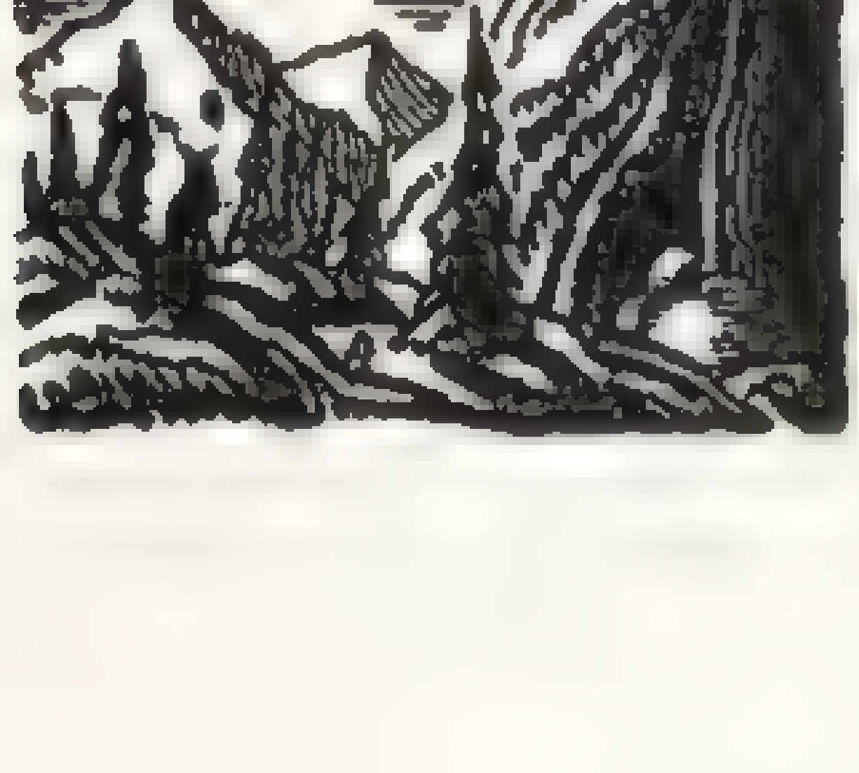
FOR
BEING ROUGH

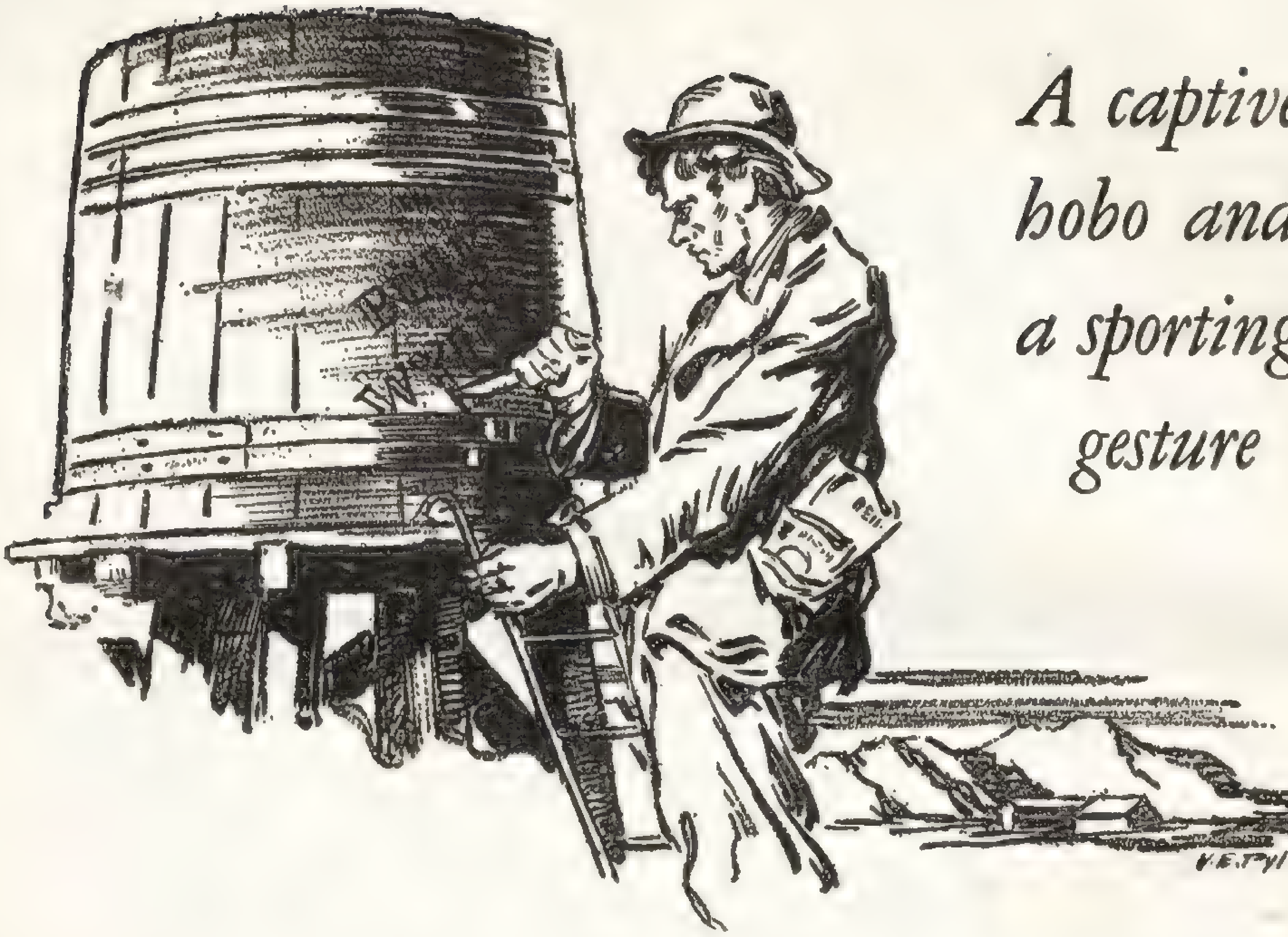
In half an hour even the heavy sleepers knew something had happened. Those who were just winding up the night came with those who had just begun the day's work. A great throng gathered in the stable and out front. Men started to whisper to a bystander—but checked themselves.

The hanging committee had come. No one knew who they were. Here were two Red Shirts, bullies, suspects in many crimes, suddenly and without warning hanged in the night. Their red-shirted pals had known them well, admired their hard careers, and some had wished they had the nerve to be as bad.

Some of these friends stood around the hanged victims, glaring at the spectators, at miners, meat-hunters, packers, teamsters, people of no special distinction, of no reputation for being "game" or fighters and killers.

In the grim approval with which the crowd regarded the punishment meted out to the disturbers of the peace the Red Shirts recognized the arrival of a new spirit of courage and power in the hearts of the populace. There was a limit to the forbearance of the community as the forever mute Charlie Carper and Dud Lucken bore witness.





A captive hobo and a sporting gesture

FOOLS' NAMES

By BARRY SCOBEE

WYLIE, toward noon, occupied himself with carving his "sign" on the side of the ranch water tank. He gripped his big jackknife in both hands and cut the characters deeply and deftly in the damp wood, for he had carved this hobo signature of his, different only in date, on the bridges and stockyard fences and washroom walls of half the railroads east of the Mississippi—though now he was in the far Southwest.

BULL WYLIE
7—14—26

Not that he was ever called by so stout a name as Bull. That was his outward expression of an inner dreaming. For he was a runty and insignificant little chap, full of useless longings and imaginings, used to getting the worst of it in the world.

Now and then he paused in his idle art to scan the range uneasily for his stiff haired boss, a boss contrarily not given to dreams or idleness and who by nature was entitled to the "cap off" of Bull.

It was a dry and thirsty land at which Wylie blinked, rolling away in endless miles of dazzling heat and scattered whirlwinds of dust—a land that put fear in the little man's heart and made music of the windmill's creaking above his head. Water dripped from the tank and formed little pools upon the ground around the concrete foundation. Once he squatted and dabbled his hands in a curious, thoughtful fascination.

When the carving was done he scanned the dusty July landscape again for Tote Waddell. And he scattered the chippings from his carving with his foot and rubbed mud over the yellow letters to hide them from the mocking eyes of the man. Then, from out of nowhere a light little truck, camouflaged with gray dust, rolled up.

IT WAS not Tote Waddell. Wylie had not seen this man before. The newcomer stuck riding boots, with spurs on them, out of the car door and followed them to the ground—a tall, lean, dry cowman who scrutinized Wylie with mild curiosity and drawled a query in one word—

"Tote?"

"Said he was going to the south past'r," answered Wylie, "to see if he still had water yet for the steer heifers."

"The what?"

"Steer yearlings, I mean," corrected Wylie hastily. "I ain't no cowboy."

The stranger gave him an incredulous look and turned to the tank, where he drank prodigiously and got water in a tin pail for his car. It seemed to Wylie that everybody and everything in the land was always thirsty. When the man had given the radiator its fill he finished off with a few more swallows and spoke again.

"Wheh'd Tote ketch you?"

"In a tight pinch," said Wylie shortly, "er I wouldn't be here."

"Cookin' for Tote?"

"Boiling beans."

The man chuckled.

"Tote sho' don't feed like a hotel," he drawled. "I stop now and then for dinner on my way to town."

"You going to a railroad?" asked Wylie sharply. "Lemme go wit' you!"

"Going beyond the railroad, to my sister's. Be back Sunday. How you fixed for dinner today? My name's Perry," the man added.

"It's ready," said Wylie.

Perry led off to the kitchen and Wylie followed, wondering what Tote Waddell would think about giving away food.

In a dark and littered kitchen a tiny cookstove simmered hotly, with a kettle of brown beans and salt pork on the back, and a pot of coffee. Perry sat at the table and Wylie shoved a pan of cold cornbread at him and poured a cup of coffee and placed a smoking full plate from the kettle.

"Mister," he whined eagerly, "lemme ride to the railroad wit' you."

"Hello," said Perry, ignoring the request and holding up a dripping hunk of pork on his fork, "this here is something extry for Tote. Usually its beans by theirselves."

Wylie waited a moment for an answer, then darted out of the house and returned shortly with a big, dripping water bag, which he hung on a nail in the door frame.

"What's that for?" asked Perry.

"Need water going to town," said Wylie.

"Lordy, boy, the road ain't but forty mile, and it don't go through Hades."

Wylie's color had heightened. He sat down on a chair in the doorway.

"How long you been here?" Perry inquired.

"Four days today," said Wylie, "an' I think he's getting ready to cut off my drinking water."

Perry regarded him curiously.

"Hmm—why haven't you pulled out?" he asked.

"Pulled out?" snarled the little man. " 'Cause he won't let me, that's one why."

"Won't let you!" Contempt went across the older man's lean face. "Here's a whole country for you to walk off in, when Tote ain't looking if necessary, and you got legs."

Wylie gazed from the door with sullen, resentful eyes at the sun scorched world and slowly shrank back as if from a visible horror.

"Mister," he whimpered, "I wouldn't go off in that by myself if—if it would give me my ambish."

"Looks like you're between the devil and the deep sea—Tote and the drouth," said Perry unfeelingly; and then seeing Wylie's acute misery, he spoke with rough compassion, "What's the matter, son, what's eatin' ye? How'd you get here and where are you from?"

WYLIE twisted around on his chair to face Perry and, as if the cowman's kindness had removed a gag, began to tumble out words.

"Las' Sat' night about dark I hit this town o' Valatoon on a rattler. Lotta bums on the rods, and the shacks ditched us. We scatter like a flock o' sparrers for handouts and water. I'm so thirsty I'm spittin' cotton but before I find a well a bum does something. I don't know what. I hear a woman holler for help like he was stealing her baby, and in a minute men are running and yelling for everybody to get their guns and round up the bos at the jail.

"Mister, you ever been throwed in jail much? Jailers is heavy fisted brutes. I give them hicks the slip and hoof it out of town on the railroad. It's darker than a step-daddy's wrath, but I hope to find a windmill or a lake, or come to some other town. I'm a stranger on the S. P. line and don't know towns are scarcer'n kind hearts. I never been off in this dirty desert before, and God helpin' me I won't again. I've learnt a lesson that'll stick to my ribs. Stay east o' the Mississip, that's me!

"Miles and miles I step along and no town comes to meet me, and no windmill, no nothing. Mister, you ever been thirsty all over?"

"The ol' moon come up a-grinnin' and I think I see a sheet of water out on the black ground a long way off. That's why, thinks I, there's no windmills. The drinks is on the lake. I hit for't, believe me."

"Couldn't have been a mirage!" ejaculated Perry.

"A big deceivin' patch o' white grass! Big as a lake. Mister, I might' nigh cried. I'm tremblin' in my legs and I got to sit down. When I start back to the railroad after a while, it's gone. I go huntin' for it. Pretty soon I'm rattled and I'm running. I'm scared black. Then I see a light and head for it, but it rises up in the sky and it ain't nothing but a star. The stars start low in this dirty desert, mister. I'm all in, and nothing but night around me . . ."

Wylie's words trailed out and he gazed wide eyed into space, while across his lonely face there seemed to pass something of the horror he had endured alone in the vast and thirsty darkness.

"And the next day, mister. Sun hot and nothing in sight but lands and hills—no railroad, no windmill, no house; on'y round black spots with red rims a-juggling in front of my eyes like soap-bubbles. And my shadow walking along wit' me for comp'ny. I'm cracked for a drink o' water, see?

"After awhile I get to thinking my shadow is a girl and we're strolling downtown for me to start my shift on my peanut and popcorn wagon. That's what I been wanting for a long time, mister, but seems like I can't save any whang to buy it with—a wagon with glass sides an' a mechanical figger turning the popper and a whistle on it. And a little cottage on a hill where I can see far off; and clost to the movies, and where I can hear the trains whistlin' outa town, wit' a woman that's got soft hands and eyes as blue as the skies in March, 'bout the time the pussy willows is out and hikin' gets good along the railroads.

"Thinking about these things out there by myself I know I'm daffy. I want to lay down and quit—but I ain't no quitter. I do lay down because I can't go any farther, and then, in the nick o' time, I hear a car, and I go running and waving and trying to holler, but I can't on'y croak like in a nightmare, and it looks like the car is going to pass me up."

THICK globules of sweat were on Wylie's forehead. With shaking fingers he twisted the stopper out of the desert bag and gulped water.

"Tote coming from Valatoon," Perry surmized, "and he brought you here?"

"Yeh—" Wylie gasped for breath—"seems like I—can't get enough—o' this stuff any more. Yeh, brung me here, and next thing he'll take away the water from me."

He screwed the stopper back and turned to Perry pleadingly.

"Mister, lemme ride to town wit' you. He's crueller'n a jailer, because he don't use his fists but words, and looks and grins. He rawhides. He don't think about the other guy, don't *hear* him. Mister, he's as dangerous as a loose bull."

"Umm—" Perry half conceded. "Tote's careless of humans and full of mockery. He's got the knack of seeing a man's weakness and gouging it with his finger."

"Ain't he though!"

"He don't set much of a table. White men won't work for him any more and Mexicans are afraid to. But Tote isn't a killer or anything like that."

It was a weak finish and Wylie knew it.

"Listen, mister," he pleaded, "can't I ride to town wit' you? Huh. Say yes, won't you?"

Perry squirmed at breaking the country's code by taking away a neighbor's hired man. He was spared an answer by the sound of a car outside. Wylie got up.

"It's him!" he said in a strained, cracked voice, and grinned an ironic grin that was almost a writhing. "Can't accept your kind and pressing invitation now, mister."

A curious resignation, a patience, and a biding of time attitude that is sometimes observed in the underdog—a latent and dangerous element—took possession of the little man and he began meekly setting out dinner for the boss.

TOTE WADDELL'S short thick figure waddled across the bare yard to the kitchen, an anticipatory grin forming on his round and red and cunning face. As he darkened the door he flung out a query to Perry without preliminary.

"Met Bull, didja?" he asked, thrusting a thumb toward Wylie's narrow back bending over the stove.

He threw off his old hat, revealing a round head with short, spikey hair, and settled into a chair at the table.

"Yeah, 'at's Bull," he insisted in a high, amused voice. "Sure, Bull Wylie. Note the strength of them shoulders. Note that neck. How you feelin' today, Bull?" The tone was laden with the intent to bait. "Had plenty of water to drink, Bull?"

Wylie turned with the fury of a small and helpless man who has not learned to parry with a shrug or a laugh, or to thrust or to be inwardly indifferent.

"You leave me be!" he shrilled.

Waddell chuckled with a nagger's delight.

"Ol' Bull Knock-'em-out hisself," he mumbled and chuckled as he applied himself to his hot beans.

Wylie shot a look at Perry, and the cowman cleared his throat.

"Tote," he asked, "you figgering on keeping him or sending him to town?"

"How come I find out he's Bull," Waddell went on, as if his guest had not spoken, "is he cyarve his name on the biscuit board."

Waddell stuck a thumb at a dough caked board hanging on the wall behind the stove. It bore, in one corner, the neatly cut name "Bull Wylie", with the date line below it.

"He cyarve it on the gate also and on the side o' the shed, and this fo'noon he cyarve it on to the water tank. I note it as I come in. He's afflicted with the cyarvitis, sure certain."

Waddell tittered.

"Reckon he ain't literary, Perry, like you and me," Waddell continued. "Reckon he never hear tell that fools' names as well as faces is often seen in public places. Ain't literary but he sho' got a capacity for water."

"I can take him along and drop him off at the railroad," said Perry. "Soon as not."

"Take Bull? Not so's you could notice it. Hands is too hard to get—and keep. An' I need a man now to do the cookin' and chorin', with this drouth a-straddle of our necks. He's going to make a good third rate cowhand soon's he learns hosses won't step on his toes and he gits over hangin' around that water tank like it was one o' these here flappers."

"Tote," said Perry, "it's no wonder you can't keep a man working for you, the way you gouge them in their weakest link."

"They is such easy marks," replied Waddell, thereby explaining his conduct and illustrating his contempt for mankind.

In the silence that ensued, save for the noise of the gross man's eating, Wylie eased from the room and felt relief at being out of Waddell's presence.

His glance fell upon Perry's little truck and he saw that in the back with two gasoline drums was a big wadded tarpaulin. A scheme to escape popped into his mind. He became as cunning as he was when catching a freight train under the noses of the brakemen. He edged away, keeping out of line with the men in the kitchen and the door and window, sly as a woods animal melting into rocks and brush. He approached the truck from the far side and with one glance at the black rectangle of the kitchen door he rolled in and under the canvas. He was immediately half smothered with heat and dust, but he lay quietly from long training.

Presently he heard the two men talking in the yard.

"Be back Sunday," Perry was saying. "Any errand I can do for you?"

"Hey, Bull!" Waddell roared. "Git in and warsh them dishes."

Wylie lay still and tense. The truck door was opened and the vehicle teetered as Perry got in.

"Well, so long," said Perry.

"Where's he got to?" Waddell grumbled. "Bull!" Then in a different tone, "Uh—what you takin' to town, Perry?"

"Just those drums."

"Nothing under the tarp?"

"Nope, and I'll have mighty little coming back, so if you want anything brought out—"

"I won't. I've got to go to town myself in the morning to git repairs for the pump in the south past'r."

Wylie could tell that Waddell's voice was shifting position. Suddenly he felt his ankles seized, and he was dragged heels first, clawing like a cat, from the truck and dropped to the ground. He dragged the canvas after him but it did not soften his fall.

"Goin' to take a leetle ride, was you, Bull?" Waddell asked tauntingly.

He took Wylie by the collar of the shirt almost casually and marched him to the kitchen, leaving Perry standing there without another word.

In the kitchen he released Wylie with a shove and stood in the doorway until Perry's truck chugged away, scratching his stubby chin, one eye closed and the other cocked contemplatively at the little man. In the end he broke into a toothy grin.

"You're a tricky little name cyarvin' wart," he observed. "I been settin' here a-planning what I could do with you tomorrow when I'm in town."

"You got no right to do anything wit' me," retorted Wylie.

"Got the might though, an' a good idee."

And with his contemplative grin he strode off through an inner door to the interior of the house.

ON WYLIE'S first evening at the ranch Waddell had lain on a quilt in the yard and talked at length about the place. Not to entertain his new man but to please his own fancy of the moment. He told how the old stone house had been built by some Mexican a hundred years before, with its one story height, its wide spread of rooms and its barred windows like a jail.

Waddell was back by the time Wylie was through with his dish washing. The man said gruffly—

"Come along!"

They went out into the hot sun to the corral. Waddell picked up a stone and threw at a mouse colored burro peeping through the fence.

"Stray brutes," he grumbled. "Belong to nobody—eatin' my grass."

In the corral he roped a horse and tied it to the fence.

"Decorate it," he told Wylie.

A bad ten minutes began for Wylie. He stretched upward in a toe walk trying to get a bridle on the high headed animal. Nothing is more exasperating to a short man, or boy, who is already worried and who knows little about horses, is half afraid of them, and who knows that he is being watched with a scathing eye. Each little failure increased his exasperation. Wylie's acquaintance with horses had always been over pasture fences. At every movement of the hoofs he would jump back. Then Waddell came and sat on a trough and grinned.

With the saddle he had even a harder time of it. He struggled and sweated with the heavy object and the restless horse. His strength was hardly equal to throwing the saddle up, and it fell to the ground time and again until he almost wept from weariness and wrath. But he did not quit. At last it was aboard and, the fun being over, Waddell cinched it for him and picked him up and set him astride in one humiliating handful.

"There you are, Bull," he said, purring the name tauntingly. "Fine work, Bull."

"The stirrups are too low," said Wylie.

"We got to hustle yearlings from now till dark."

"Won't I take a canteen of water?" asked Wylie in sharp alarm.

"Go through that gate there," directed the ranchman.

"We got to have water!" cried Wylie.

Waddell opened a gate and led Wylie's horse through willynilly. He was almost impersonal about these arrogant acts. It was actually as if he did not realize the presence of another, which made his ways doubly offensive.

Waddell mounted his own horse and they trotted off into the pasture, Wylie bouncing in his saddle as only a green and stirrupless rider can. He held on to horn and cantle, a jiggling and ridiculous figure in acute misery.

The horse, as horses will, realized that it was "packed." The lack of a firm and reassuring rein and the feel of the rider's fear alarmed it. It increased its speed, broke into a gallop. The loose stirrups beat its sides and rattled, and the horse set into a run that for Wylie grew more wicked at every stride.

Wylie lunged from side to side, hanging on desperately. Waddell roared with laughter. And then, a half mile away, Wylie fell off.

But he did something that many a better rider has failed to do; he held on to a bridle rein, held on grimly with an admirable tenacity, though thereby he was dragged and all but trampled on.

When the horse at last came to a stop Wylie got himself up painfully and began to shorten the stirrups. They were buckled instead of laced and the task was about done when Waddell arrived. The ranchman rode alongside, bent down and, with one lift of his short, thick arms, set Wylie into the saddle again.

Wylie promptly went off on the other side, determined to get his stirrup properly adjusted.

"You leave me alone!" he snarled across the saddle at Waddell, and there was a savage, threatening hate in his face. "I'll—I'll—" he panted.

"You'llwhat?"askedWaddell. "What'll you do to me? What could you do to me, you little name cuttin' hobo?"

Wylie had the stirrup fastened now. Without replying he drew his horse away a step or two and scrambled up. When he was firmly aboard he felt a touch of pride in the accomplishment.

This faint sense of elation soon vanished in the work of the afternoon—hard, hot riding after yearlings to round them up at what Waddell called his house tank, where they could get water for a few days. The saddle bruised Wylie's flesh and thirst ravaged him. His hate of Waddell shimmered and glowed from his reddened eyes. He itched to staunch Waddell's flowing mockery, to make Waddell stop once and think. He itched too to retrieve his pride, his self esteem—and this was something new for the little tramp—brought to the surface by the unbearable arrogance and power of the ranchman.

And Wylie began to dream of a way to escape. He thought that he might take Waddell's old car and go in the night. He thought of impractical schemes and this and that, and all the time his hate swelled to make Waddell eat crow.

But his paramount idea was to get away and back to the railroad and return to the East again—or at least this became paramount as he suffered through the afternoon for water. Hate of the land came to share with his hate of Tote Waddell.

HE WAS frantic for water when the two riders arrived at the ranch-house toward sunset. He would have injured himself with drinking had not Waddell cut down the allowance immediately to three swallows and sent him to building a supper fire before permitting him more. Waddell was in a way efficient; he had no wish for a sick cook on his hands.

Wylie assimilated moisture gradually, so that when supper was over and Waddell was stretched out on his quilt on the ground, wallowing in his underclothes and bare feet, the little man was content to sit in the kitchen door and sip water now and then from a can beside him. Waddell was in a gabbing mood. He talked of going to town the next day, remarking that Bull would have plenty of time to rest and carve his name. He called attention, too, to a sharp glinting of light with a violet tinge to it far off in the northwest.

"Star," said Wylie, remembering how when he was alone the first night in this arid region he had seen the stars the second they topped the horizon.

"You're seein' stars," said Waddell. "That's the headlight of the eastbound limited. Stops there to take water and pass the westbound."

"How far from here?" asked Wylie eagerly.

"Too fur for you, Bull, powerful as ye are. Around thirty-five mile with nothing in between but heat and thirst."

Wylie regarded the tiny, stabbing flicker, reflecting on its distance from him. Presently it faded, and he supposed that two trains had passed, one roaring eastward to the land of green trees and green grass and rains.

Where at one time he would have experienced a passive tug of loneliness he now felt a thrust of keen hope. Why not escape tonight in the old car, abandon it later, and be in the offing the next evening to catch that eastbound lifesaver? He squirmed with the very daring and pleasure of the idea and began to heed every movement of Tote Waddell, and weigh and measure and watch.

He retired to his dusty, stuffy room, with its soiled bed, in the hope that without anybody to talk at Waddell would get to bed also, and to sleep.

Wylie was so weary that he dozed as soon as he lay down. Sometime later he was disturbed by sounds, for he was keyed high despite his sleepiness and he had the sense that Waddell had come to bed. This aroused Wylie and he forced himself to sit up in bed.

To escape from Tote Waddell he would take the old flivver and go northeast on the road toward Valatoon for a few miles, then cut off to the left and head northwest. Come daylight he would hide the car and make his way on foot whatever short distance should remain. His plans were not definite. They would be subject to many circumstances, he reflected, as he slid out of bed and headed—he had kept his clothes on—past Waddell's door and through the kitchen to the outer door.

The wind was sweetly cool as it touched him. He passed outside on tiptoe. Waddell had put in gasoline and oil and water for an early start and left the car under the shed. Wylie told himself that the sounds of starting there would be muffled. He could be away before Waddell knew it. And there was no telephone.

THE MOON was not up and the night was dark. The windmill on the north of the house creaked and groaned. Wylie stepped out with loosening, eager muscles.

"Goin' to git a drink, Bull, er cyarve y'r name?"

Wylie shrank back to keep from stepping on Waddell.

"Got me a piller and blanket to sleep out here in the cool," said the ranchman. "G'ni', Bull. Sweet dreams, Bull."

To the tune of Waddell's sleepy, taunting laughter Wylie went back to his bed. He lay awake awhile trying to decide whether to make another attempt this night, but fell asleep in spite of himself.

Hobo habits had given Wylie early rising practises that fitted Waddell's, and both were up shortly after the break of day. But Wylie did not come into contact with the older man until the breakfast table was reached. Waddell had a smirk on his face and a peculiar way of regarding Wylie, that did not disappear throughout the brief and greasy meal. When they finished eating Waddell got up and said simply—

"Foller me."

Wylie had dreaded this morning. He was suspicious. But there was nothing for it but to follow. Waddell led down a dusty, littered hallway and stopped before a door that stood partly open, revealing a black room beyond.

It was a massive wooden door set to the stone on huge iron hinges with a great iron hook to fasten in an iron staple. Evidently the room had been cleared, for there were marks of dragging on the dusty hall floor and an old mattress leaking excelsior sagged against the wall.

In a motion Waddell seized Wylie, gripped his wrists together and searched him swiftly, robbing him of his big jackknife, which he flipped carelessly to the floor. Then with an amused chuckle and with casual strength, he shoved the little man staggering into the dark room, banging the door shut behind him. Even as Wylie turned he heard the hook drop into place outside. He flung himself against the boards but they were like a solid wall.

"Hey," he yelled hoarsely.

"You'll have all day for that," came the muffled voice of Waddell. "I'll be back by night, maybe."

"Don't shut me up!" cried Wylie. "I won't run off. Leave me some water, mister. Hey!"

The last was an astonished protest, for he could hear the man's heavy tread, muffled by the thick dust, going away along the hall.

The little man stood still listening with open mouth and pounding heart hoping to hear Waddell returning with water, but instead he heard the car start. He turned to a little barred window and, standing tiptoe and pulling himself up with his hands, he saw Waddell in his old automobile rattling off on the road northeast toward Valatoon.

Wylie tried the heavy door again, his hands feeling eagerly along the edges in the half dark for some finger hold. But the door was set flush in its frame and there was no opening along its sides. Nor, throwing his weight against it, could he even shake it.

He examined the walls in the same eagerness. They were of rough stone without an opening except the little iron barred window. The floor was of stone, thick with the dust of years. Wylie paused, baffled. It went through his heated thoughts that this was the treasure room, or jail, of the old Mexican don. He tried the window bars, but they were thick and strong and as impregnable as the walls.

The windmill and tank were a few yards away from the window. The pump was pouring water into the tank at each regular lift of the piston. Wylie knew that the tank's overflow ran by a pipe down the hill behind the house to a trough where the cattle were always bawling and drinking, and in his imagination he could hear the water trickling there. In reality, though he could not see it, he could hear the dripping of the water from the tank upon the ground where the tank leaked.

With the perversity of such a situation Wylie was immediately famished for a drink. He coughed from the dust that his movements had stirred.

He seized the window bars with a kind of desperation—and was arrested by the thought that he was making a fool of himself. He released his grip and stood, thinking. He thought as he had not thought out on the range that first night, as perhaps he had never thought before. He dropped his hands behind his back and began pacing to and fro, slowly.

IN THE hours that followed, sitting or pacing, his thoughts raced, most of the time in a muddle. Out of this muddle one idea began to take shape. He must escape from Waddell, from this hateful, thirsty land, but to succeed he must somehow get the best of Tote Waddell, must "do" him.

It occurred to Wylie that he had never got the best of anybody where it really counted, not even himself. He saw himself in a fit of anger as little more than a stray dog that had been kicked about for years.

His thought finally settled down to ways and means of getting the advantage of his jailer. After a long time he slept from the weariness of his mental grind.

When he awakened he could tell by the shadows outside that it was late in the afternoon. His thirst was acute. The pour and drip and splash of the water was torment. He consoled himself with the thought that Waddell would be back before long. And he remembered the plan that had got into his mind before he slept. He began to peer out along the road for the coming of the ranchman.

He could see for miles across the country. Toward sunset the visibility was what is called high. But no car flowed into sight. And darkness came and no headlights cut through.

He remembered and saw again the little stabbing, steely light in the northwest, which was the eye of the great eastbound passenger train, and with a thought to the future he tried to fix the direction in his mind by the Great Dipper and the North Star.

For hours, with clamoring thirst and gnawing hunger, he watched the darkness for Waddell's headlights, but at last physical weakness got the better of him and he lay down. He slept a nightmarish sleep at times, dreaming of water—of pans and pails and tubs of water all around him.

In the wee small hours, those bad hours in which to be wideawake, he drifted into thinking that Waddell might have been killed by an automobile or a hobo highwayman, or have been thrown in jail. Terror got hold of him. He might stay locked up here until he perished! He recalled that the man Perry was to return Sunday, but he knew that he could not survive that long. He shook at the bars again and jabbered and called, to realize eventually that he was playing the fool again.

Daylight brought some relief, as it always does, and something of sanity and fresh strength. His plan for overcoming his jailer, when he held it steadily in mind, somewhat replaced his hunger and thirst thoughts. So he forced himself to sit with his back to the door and keep quiet and think concentratedly—as much as he could—on his revenge.

When the spike haired brute should return, as Wylie communed to himself about it, he, Wylie, would conceal himself behind the door and wait until Waddell swung it inward. By silence he would entice Waddell to enter, and in the gloom he would slip out behind the man, draw the door shut and drop the hook in the staple.

But even with Wylie's best efforts at self control the hours were a daytime nightmare. He would find himself at the window cursing the red faced ranchman and the water and the walls that shut him in; and once he caught himself laughing loudly at nothing. He was scared at what was happening to him, and each time he drove himself back to sit against the door.

He was disciplining himself, though he did not know it. His patience and meekness of years were bearing a little fruit. The latent power in him was getting ready to strike.

Toward the end he forgot his plan for doing Tote Waddell, forgot that he was waiting for the man's return, forgot everything but his withering thirst. Time ceased to be of any significance.

AND THEN he was brought back to himself by the honking of an automobile horn. From the window he saw Waddell driving up. The car passed from his line of vision, but in a moment Waddell came waddling to the well.

"Hello, in there," he called jovially; and casually, "how's tricks?"

Wylie stepped back so as not to be seen. He heard the ranchman draw a drink at the faucet, saw him gulp water; and Wylie's hands went up to his own mouth as if he too were lifting a cup of the cool fluid.

Waddell left the well, and in a moment Wylie, listening tautly, heard his steps in the hall. Wylie, trembling in his exhaustion and excitement, made ready for his coup.

"How are ye in there?" came Waddell's muffled voice and easy laugh. "Kind of a joke on ye, Bull, locked up over thirty hours. Had to order the repairs by the telegraph and wait for 'em on the train."

Wylie made no reply. He heard the hook lifted from the staple.

"What kind of condition are ye in?" asked Waddell in a different voice. "Don't want no sick tramp on my hands."

"Bad," Wylie croaked as loudly as he could, which was not loud.

The door swung inward. Wylie stopped it gently, cowering against it. He knew that Waddell was peering into the dusk. Waddell edged in.

"Where air ye?" he demanded impatiently.

He stepped past the edge of the door. Wylie swung the door a little and moved a little so that he was almost behind the thick figure. On sudden impulse he braced himself close to Waddell and shoved. The man, taken off his balance, staggered a step or two. And Wylie, with the swiftness of a frightened, tense little man, darted through the door with a squeal and drew it after him, dropping the hook into the staple.

IN THE late afternoon Wylie drove the stray burro that Waddell had flung a stone at into the corral, got a rope on it and led it to the kitchen door.

A cryptic grin had for sometime been growing on his wan little face. He had another plan in mind. He was becoming proud of himself. He had used discretion in drinking when he first got to water. The fight of his life had been in taking one swallow instead of two or three or ten. He had wanted to drink forever.

But by a force of character that he had never exhibited before he had refrained from overdoing, and had absorbed moisture gradually. And he had taken food the same way. He was inwardly applauding himself; and applause, they say, gives a man a sense of power and sometimes elevates him to success.

He tied the burro at the door and hung a sort of saddle pack across it. On one side was the big water bag, fat with water. On the other, a burlap sack of food. Behind the pack was a blanket. He wasn't stealing; the burro was of unknown or no ownership, which was why he was taking it instead of the car. The supplies were his pay for the work he had done on the ranch. He meant to ride northward presently, daring the trek across the thirsty world to the railroad, when he should have finished this new plan that so amused him.

The burro ready, Wylie went back to the cellroom where Waddell was locked in. The man had been placative, talking through the barred window, on Wylie's two or three trips to the well. Wylie wondered what he would say now.

In the hall, with the late sunlight streaming through a dusty window at the end, Wylie picked up his knife that Waddell had carelessly flung down. And the prisoner, hearing him, began to talk.

"Ah," he said with relief, "there you are, sonny boy. Knowed y'd let me out purty soon. It's been a good joke on old Tote. Tables turned, eh? He-he-he!"

Wylie planted himself with feet wide apart, gripped his knife in both hands and began to carve.

"Hey," Waddell asked in a moment, "whatcha doin'?"

Wylie said nothing but kept on carving. Waddell shook at the door tentatively, making the iron hook tinkle in the staple.

"Whatcha doin'?" he repeated impatiently. "Come on, sonny, raise the hook and let old Tote out. I won't hurt ye. I like a smart young feller like you."

Wylie laughed and, like a match to a fuse, it set the man to fuming. He beat on the door and kicked it and bawled profanity which changed to pleading that he was thirsty and hungry. All the while Wylie carved away.

"Pshaw, boy," said Waddell at last, "I didn't mean to do you dirt. I was kept in town by—by unforeseen circumstances. Didja get thirsty? And hungry?"

Wylie maintained his silence with the cryptic grin still haunting his face. What a great joke it would be when the man Perry returned Sunday and let Waddell out and Waddell would spy this last carved name!

"Hey, Bull," began Waddell anew, "you open this door and let me out. Hear me? I'll take y'r hide off if you don't."

But the only response was the sound of Wylie's knife cutting the wood.

Wylie could hear the ranchman panting in his wrath.

After a while the job of cutting was finished and Wylie stood back to regard it in the last red rays of the sun. He had carved this time with a spirit of elation, of triumph in his work and the spirit of taunting. There in yellowish white letters was something for Waddell to see, and remember, and ponder upon:

BULL WYLIE
7—16—26

THERE seemed to be laughter and recklessness and jibing in those curves and curlimacues that were so much fancier than he had ever carved before.

Wylie, in his imprisonment, had found that the door lacked a finger breadth of touching the floor. Now he shoved the chips and shavings from his work under the door with his toe.

"What's that?" asked Waddell suspiciously, and Wylie heard his fingers fumbling in the litter, then a sharp query, "Whatcha cyarvin', Bull?"

Wylie returned to the burro. He rested awhile on the doorstep, for he was weak and weary. One less inured to hardship would scarcely have been up on his feet. When night settled he mounted, ready to be off. A few miles on toward the longed for railroad and the trains bound eastward he would roll up in the blanket and sleep till day, and then continue with fresh strength and in daylight. Somehow he was no longer particularly apprehensive of the "dirty desert"; it could do him no worse, he reflected, than the locked room.

He started off the donkey. He rode slowly, dissatisfied all at once with a feeling that something was lacking. He could not keep from thinking of Waddell there in the cell. It would be a long time to keep a man cooped up—from early Friday afternoon until sometime Sunday when Perry was supposed to return.

He remembered his own suffering in a sudden wave of distress, remembered the torture of his thirst, with the water dripping and pouring and splashing just outside the barred window.

A word came to him from an unknown source, the sport page perhaps, or the movies—sporting. It wasn't sporting to go away and leave Waddell like that.

He halted the burro and pondered. And another idea plopped into his mind. He mulled it, straightening it out, and laughed. What a finish, what a tweak at the ranchman! And fair play too—fair enough.

Only a dwarfed little mind saturated with kindly intention would ever have thought of such a thing. Wylie turned the burro back and tied it to a post well away from the house where Waddell could not hear it and went afoot to the kitchen. At the door he removed his shoes and went on cautiously to the cell door.

He listened. Heavy breathing came to him, and a sound that might have been Waddell tugging at the window bars.

Soundlessly, with infinite caution, Wylie lifted the hook from the staple and let it down against the door. Then he tiptoed away.

When Waddell grew desperate—thought Wylie—grew as desperate as Wylie had been, he would hammer on the boards, or tug at the bottom crack, and find that the door was not fastened.

Wylie thrilled. What a comedown for Waddell—that taunting signature, the unlocked door!

Wylie went back to his burro and rode off into the darkness. He knew that Waddell might get out at any minute and follow after him. But that lent a zest to the night.

He felt sporting, as he had never felt before. But more than that. He felt the lift of accomplishment, of defiance to a hard world. In his queer new sense of strength his ambition seemed nearer than it ever had. He could even smell hot roasting peanuts and popcorn in a glassed in wagon on a good corner.

The Temple

by J. L. RENDEL

ALL THE largest coconut palms in the world seem to be massed together across this southern tip of India. Everywhere their slender, curving trunks go up fifty, seventy feet, their enormous interlaced fronds forming a continuous roof overhead. The night breeze rustling through them has a sound like that of the sea on a shingle beach. Only where a wider street makes a break is there a glimpse of a winding lane of sky between them. It brings almost a shock with its sudden infinitude of space, the stars burning brightly in soft remoteness.

The one story houses have open, or pillared, fronts, where hissing kerosene flares shine on heaped fruit, masses of ceremonial jasmine marigold blossoms, and all that glittering trumpery which accompanies a festival the world over.

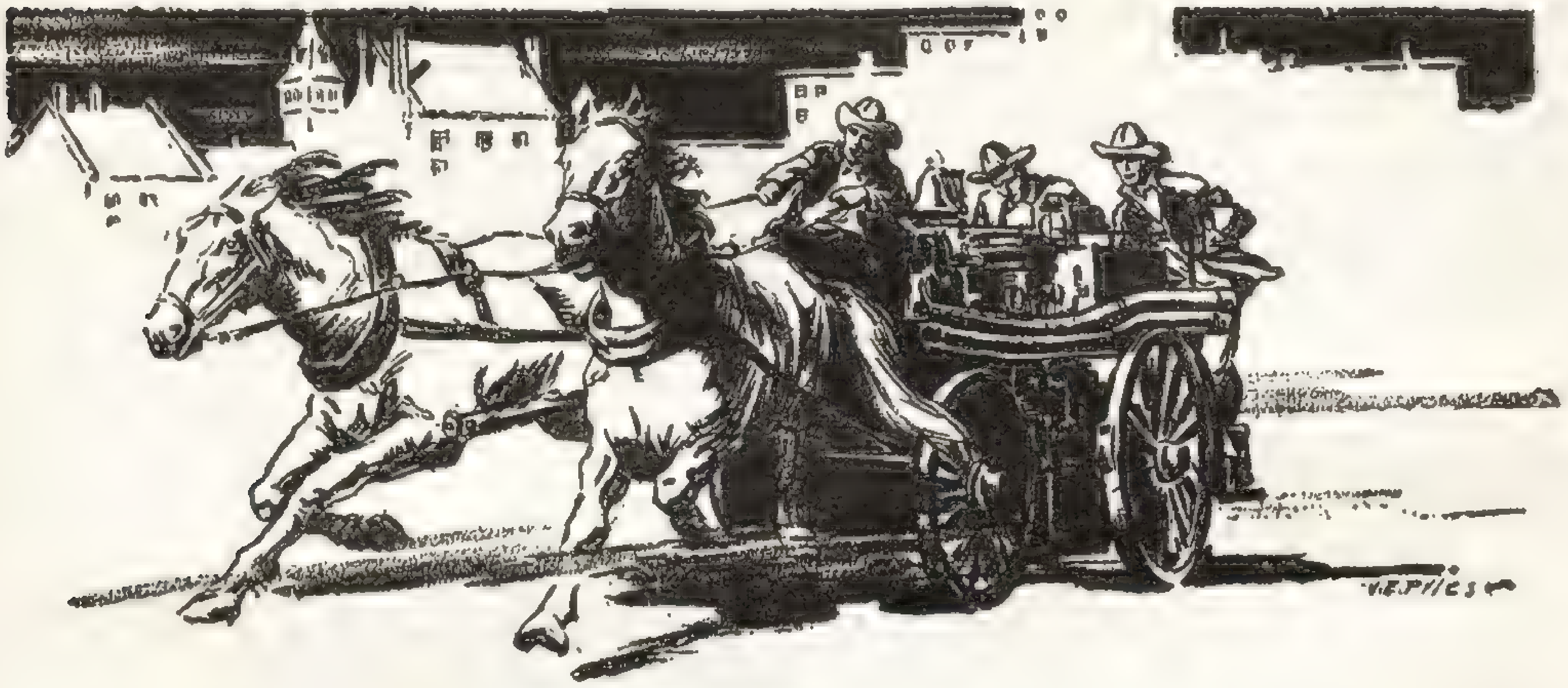
Among that milling mass of people progress is impossible, except that, like some thick and sluggish river, it is all moving imperceptibly toward the temple. Burly *babus* and *bunniahs* are masses of bare, bronze fat clear down to their waists. Naked *yogis*, mere bluish racks of bones smeared with cow dung and ashes, whine sacred verses and thrust forth begging bowls.

A three domed bullock cart, with ladies of rank hidden behind its red and gold curtains, is hopelessly wedged in the throng. Low caste women, wrapped from head to foot in gorgeous flowered muslins, hug brown babies astride of their hips. Their arms are stiff with silver bracelets, their eyes brilliant between lines of black paint; and behind each a lean dark, peasant husband keeps grim lipped guard.

At the street's end the outer wall of the temple rises like a hewn cliff. Over the gateway the tapering *gopura* lifts its twenty to thirty stories of intricate carving. Tier on tier of figures, so deeply cut away as to be almost detached from the stone. Lines of elephants and sacred bulls, of dancing *apasaras* and *gandharvas*, with central figures of the many armed, many headed greater gods. In that shifting light cast up from the street they seem almost to crawl and breathe, as if the whole mass of stone had become infected with some horrid, putrid sort of life.

From behind the temple walls come periodic drum crashes and the peculiar, moaning blare of conch shells. The air is weighed down by odors. Dust, sweating flesh, the sick sweetness of dying blooms, and that all pervading, indescribable reek which seems inseparable from India; the effluvia of a land that has been too much and too long used.

A Story of a Man Who Couldn't Stay Whipped



D'ARTAGNAN
of
Hose Company No. 6

By EDWARD L. McKENNA

MOST of the firemen were sitting outside the house in their sateen shirtsleeves, enjoying the hazy twilight of September. Now and then you could hear a horse stamping in his stall and, from above, the click of shuffled cards.

"They got that new boot in the pinochle game," said somebody.

"Yeah. Ain't he some sketch, that guy?"

"You said it."

"He walks in here yesterday with his new uniform on and his hat on the back of his head and he says, 'Hello, boys, I'm Frank Dougherty,' and Big McLaughlin says, 'What am I supposed to do—fall down dead?' And he just laughs like he liked it. He certainly is some chesty little runt, that guy. I never saw any guy talked out of his turn like he does. I figure somebody ought to mention it to him; what do you say?"

"You said it."

UPSTAIRS, the new boot, Francis J. Dougherty aforesaid, was saying, "I bid three fifty," and Big McLaughlin was scowling at one hundred and fifty trumps, pinochle, and the queens; which, as everybody knows, counts up to two fifty, but is a rotten hand to have to play.

"Three sixty," he said finally.

"Good," said the next man and Dougherty, too, tapped the table.

Big Mac turned up the kitty which contained, to his displeasure, the two nines and the jack of clubs.

"I'd have bought it," said Dougherty.

"Two more, no, three more trumps and the jack for the hundred and fifty. I had the aces—oh, you going to play it Mac?"

"Why don't you tell him your whole hand?" said Big Mac unpleasantly. "I'm gonna play it and make it. You watch me!"

He lost it by only twenty-five and it cost him seventy cents apiece to the others.

"I got enough," announced Dougherty after this conclusion was reached.

He did have enough too; he had three dollars and eighty-five cents profit. He hadn't been requested to sit in the pinochle game, and he quit it the same way. Crashing into a well established pinochle game in a police station or a firehouse is a little like asking the Flonzaley Quartette if they'd mind you bringing your violin over some night when they're practising. Furthermore, Dougherty was no Hoyle at pinochle, but he was a violent and lucky bidder and one who would explain how he had played the hand and how he thought you might have had the ace of diamonds, or whatever.

Stuffing his winnings into his pockets, he went downstairs and joined the other brothers outside the house.

"How did you make out?" some one asked him.

"Oh, I won about five dollars. I think those guys bid their hands too high."

A hush fell upon them but it was not for long.

"Pretty soft, this is," said Dougherty. "You don't know how soft this is. If you been working in a blacksmith's shop like I been, you'd know."

"You been working in a blacksmith shop?"

"Yeah. Over on Varick Street. You get so darn tired of having them big draft horses lean on you all day long. It ain't interesting work, either."

A monosyllable.

"What's that? Who said that?"

"Me. I said it. Whatcha gonna do about it?"

Dougherty turned to the audience.

"Inside all right?"

"Sure, unless you'd sooner get killed out here," they told him.

"After you," said Dougherty with a wave of his hand to his impolite antagonist. It was his last graceful gesture. In the next five minutes Dougherty received a black eye and other bruises, and by and by they were throwing water over him.

THIS happened three times the first week he was a fireman. You could say this for him, though; he didn't bar the big ones and he didn't stop till he was all through. One of these round arm swingers, he was, and one punch in the nose and he'd go crazy.

Two hours after one of these encounters he would be as noisy as ever. It didn't teach him anything. Also, he did find one or two that he could lick, himself, but he didn't seem to get interested much in them. He was really pretty small, though he had a chest a hoople wouldn't go around. Nobody knows exactly how he could have passed his examination; he used to boast that Canning was a friend of his, and Pat McMahon too—one of his fights was on account of a nasty remark about Canning and, as it happened, he won it.

They taught him to be a pretty fair fireman. The job he really wanted was to drive the engine. A fine chance he had, the size of him. Horses he certainly liked; he had a good knack with them. There was a tough stallion, the off horse on the truck, with whom everybody was a little careful. Dougherty got the horse so that he'd eat carrots or apples out of his hand. Some said it was Dougherty's hand the horse was after, but nobody else wanted to try it.

Perhaps he didn't have many friends inside the firehouse, but he had lots of luck outside it—to hear himself tell it. No servant girls either, real hightoned girls. Maybe he did, at that; he wasn't such a bad looking fellow when he didn't have a black eye or a swollen lip.

There was one girl he never talked about. He saw her one morning at eight o'clock Mass in St. Michael's. A big, husky girl, two good inches taller than he was, and looking like one of the better nourished Irish saints. Lovely and good natured and a little stupid, maybe. You could easily think of her as walking the length of a broad land with a golden cup in her hand and none to molest her. But then probably poor Deirdre thought that she could, too, and look what happened to her. Oh, no, this girl's name wasn't Deirdre; that's another girl, a long time ago.

This one knelt and read her prayer book, and from the back of the church Dougherty watched her.

Dougherty gave her a killing glance as she left the church, but she paid no heed to him. The next Sunday he spoke to her, but she passed him by, and her step was the step of a queen, as the old story says. The following week he followed her and it took all his speed, what with his short legs.

"Listen, lady, I'm Frank Dougherty. I'd like to get acquainted with you. What do you say?"

"You're too little," she said, and smiled, a smile too wide for demureness, and was gone.

That afternoon he had a run in with Big Mac. They had been playing handball—they used to play for a dollar a game. Dougherty wasn't such a bad handball player, but Big Mac could beat the life out of him. Mac used to let him win once in a while just to nurse the kid along. Anyhow, Mac was just kidding him.

"You little runt," he said, and Dougherty jumped up and hit him an awful slap in the face.

You wouldn't expect Mac to stand for that, and he handed him an awful clouting. Dougherty was cursing and crying, too—yes, he was—and running in, swinging wide open, and finally Mac put his hand on his chest and gave him a shove backward.

"Cut it out!" he said. "You got enough."

"I'll show you who's got enough," said Dougherty and he made another rush at him. But Mac had turned his back and was walking away and Dougherty pulled himself up and stood there, shaking, and the tears running down his face.

THAT was Sunday. Tuesday there was a nasty fire on Broome Street—a livery stable. The alarm came at two o'clock in the morning, and by the time the engines got there the place was past saving. The captain of Six pulled his men back out of it very properly and set them to work at the adjoining property. Dougherty was up on one of the roofs when all of a sudden he said—

"I can't stand this!"

It was the horses inside, screaming and neighing; they scream, well, not like a person, but it's horrible. Down he went and into the crowd till he found a policeman.

"Give us your gat," he said.

"What for?" said the cop.

But Dougherty was reaching for it where he figured it must be and in a second he had it and was running toward the stable. He had the gun over his head, shaking it, and he was hollering—

"*Fag-a—Ballagh!*"

That's something an old blind king shouted when they carried him out in his ivory chair for one last whack at the Danes.

"*Brian, aboo! Fag-a Ballagh!*"

It made quite a hit, and you'd be surprised how many Irish know it who never heard tell of the old blind king—no, nor the Danes, either. Clear the way, it means.

And then inside the stable the gun cracked. And then again—and again—and again—four times. Then silence.

Whereupon Big Mac went into the stable not hollering anything, but spitting on his hands. He came out again in a minute with Dougherty under his arm.

"I thought I was going to lose my meal ticket," he said. "The crazy dope. He shot three of them horses all right."

Big Mac got a mention for his night's work and Dougherty got a bawling out.

SUNDAY following, Dougherty was at St. Michael's bright and early. Sure enough, the girl was there and in a new dress. He was in the back as usual. When she came out he walked up to her, bold as brass, and grabbed her by the arm.

"Listen, kid," he said. "You may be big, Gawd bless you, but I could break you in half. If you want to get rid of me, call a cop, and I'll kill him for you. Listen, my name is Dougherty. I'm all right, see, I'm no bum. I ain't making any mistakes about you; anybody could see what you are by looking at you. I want to travel around with you. You give me a chance. I'm all right, see? I'll show you. I'm gonna be a battalion chief. It's only a question of time, you wait and see. What d'ya say?"

She was looking straight ahead, but her lips were parted a little.

"I guess you're all right. I—I guess you can come and see me if you want. My name is McCann. I live over on Goerck Street. You'll see my father's name on the door. He's a harness maker."

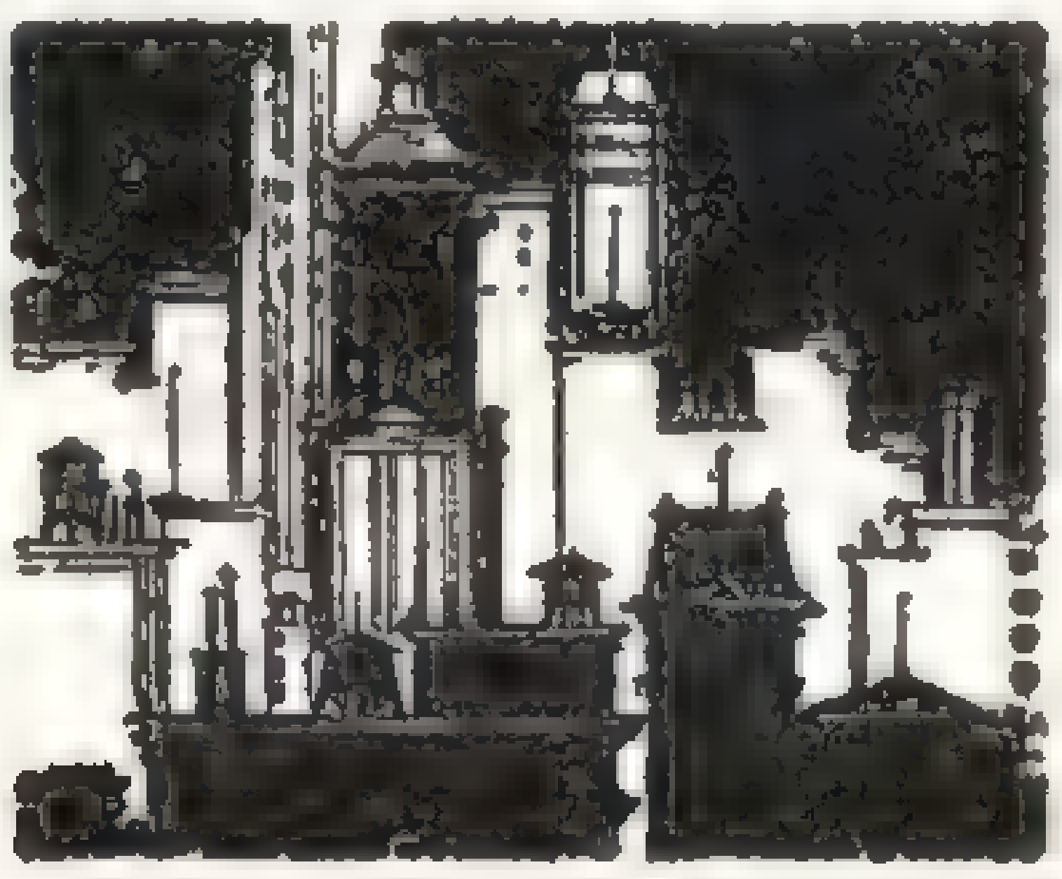
"What's your first name?"

THEY have six children, now, and three dead. No, Dougherty never got to be a battalion chief, but he was retired as a captain and his record is studded with citations. A good leader, they say—lost quite a few men, put out a lot of fires, too.

Saw him strutting up and down Pine Street the time of the Equitable fire. Every once in awhile a piece of mortar would miss him. Red faced, getting pretty heavy, and his language, as he stood there in the face of death, was disgraceful. That was his last year and a pretty hard one it was.

While he was cursing there his wife probably was burning candles, and the rosary beads never out of her hands. She weighs close to three hundred pounds and she wouldn't remind you of Deirdre now. Nothing remains of her beauty except her kind eyes. The Doughertys, however, wouldn't be divorced even if their religion permitted it and they could afford it.

Oh, yes. Big Mac was Deputy Commissioner for awhile till they kicked him out on a graft charge. Don't say anything nasty about him to Dougherty unless you are looking for violence.



Red Harvest

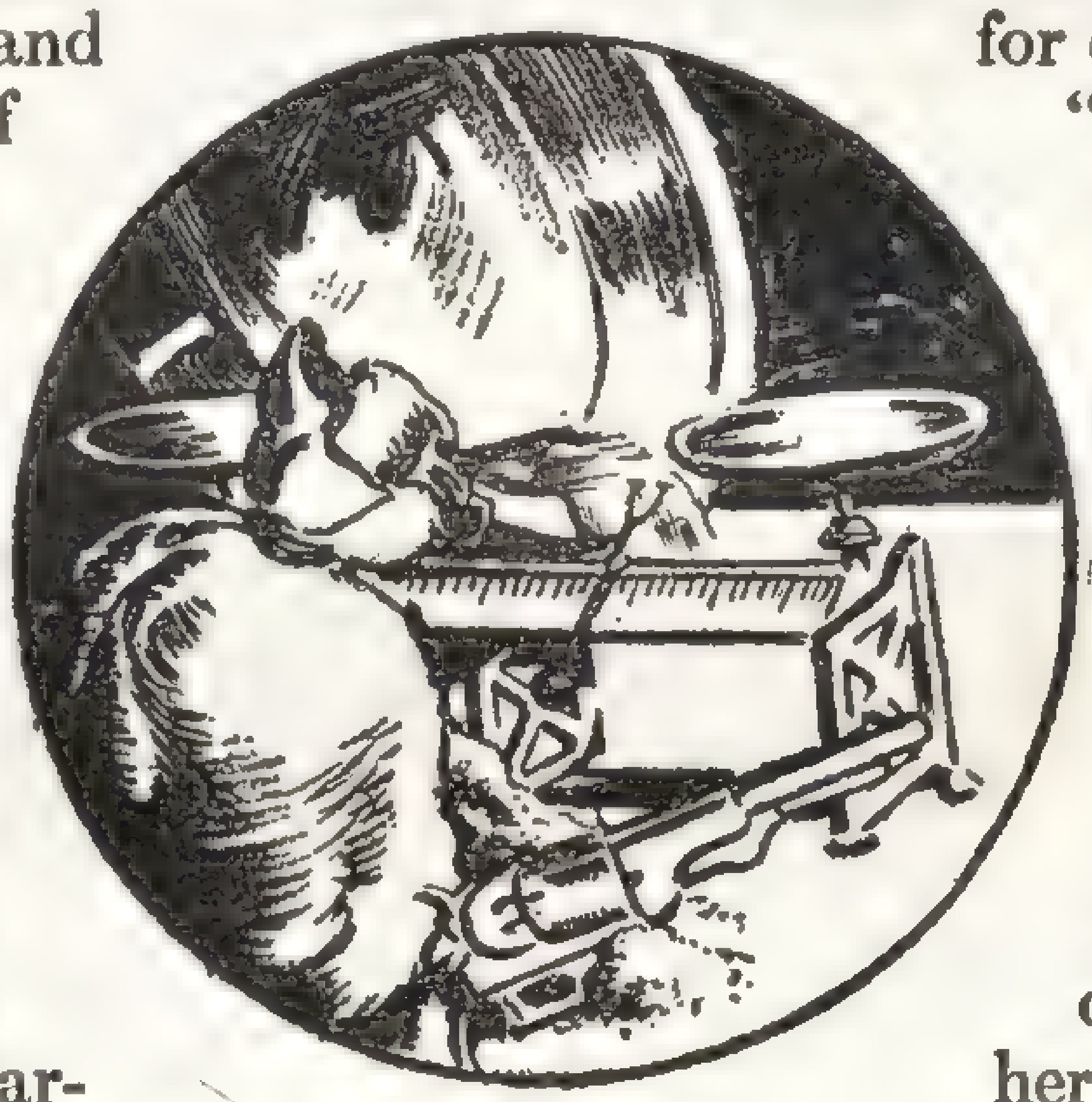
By

HUGH PENDEXTER

CHAPTER I

THE PRICE OF BACON

WHEN Stephen Joyce, Tennesseean, landed from the small steamboat twelve miles above the mouth of the Snake, he stared in amazement at what appeared to be a city of marble. At night he would find Lewiston, the capital of the new and vast territory of Idaho, to to be a porous city, with light showing through its very walls and roofs. For it was built of cotton cloth, stretched over frameworks of poles. But it was no time for wonderment for one who had food stuffs to sell.



A month back flour had sold in Walla Walla, down the Columbia, for twenty-four dollars a pound; and prospectors on Oro Fino, Florence and Warner Creeks were finding it far easier to get gold than to buy bacon and bread. Joyce had managed to bring a ton of flour and a miscellany of other staples and had arranged for more to follow. While his freight was being landed he wondered whether the white town was inhabited only by fiddlers; for there was no surcease of dance music being played on these instruments.

By free use of gold he secured a tent near the landing to house his stores and hired two nondescript characters to guard it until he could convey it to town. But even he, with all his foreknowledge, had not correctly gaged the hunger east of the great bend of the Snake. Before he could erect the shelter a dozen clamorous merchants and speculators were surrounding him. Offers were hurled at him so rapidly that the first offer was buried dollars deep before he could answer.

"Three thousand dollars for what you have without any more fuss," roared a big man with bushy whiskers and rags for clothes.

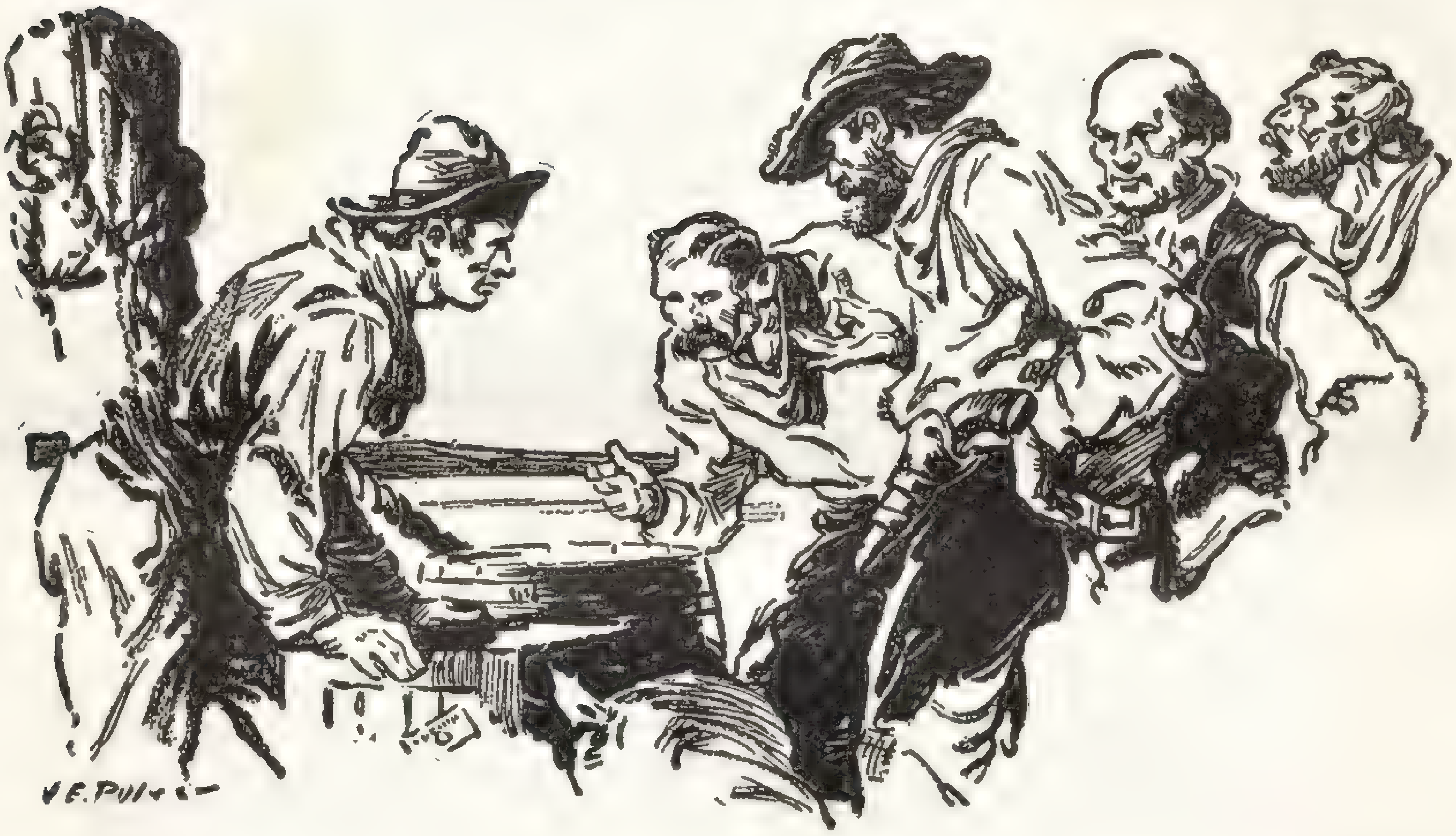
"Four thousand dollars if you sell now!" shrilly cried a thin faced ferret of a man.

Joyce opened his mouth to accept the last offer when his gaze was attracted by sight of a young woman running toward him frantically, her hoops swaying, her curls of tawny gold flying, her arms waving. A second glance, and the young man's face glowed with the light of a most pleasing discovery. He pawed frantic bidders from his path and advanced with outstretched hands to meet the newcomer. As she came to a panting halt, her hands in his, he cried:

"Good land! Miss Lavinia Cathrood! To think of you being 'way up here! Lost track of you and your brother 'Gene in Portland."

Quite breathless from running, she released her hands and pointed to the mound of provisions and gasped:

A Novelette of a Gold Dust Town in the Idaho Territory



"Your outfit? We must—have some. Eugene and I—run—eating-place."

"Take them! Take all you want!" he cried, sweeping his arm in a generous circle.

"I'm buying, not taking, Mr. Joyce."

"Mistering me is something new," he glumly complained. "I thought we were acquainted."

"I want to buy some of your provisions, Stephen," she told him.

The thin faced man pressed forward and impatiently reminded:

"Say, mister, I made you an offer of four thousand dollars. Don't I git any play for my money?"

"Ladies first," growled Joyce. "How much do you want, Miss Lavinia?"

The girl, now quite recovered from her efforts, glanced shrewdly over the food stuffs and named five hundredweight of flour, a quantity of bacon and some beans and peas.

"My men will take them away shortly, and you can call at the eating place for your money," she crisply told him.

The high bidder wrathfully exclaimed:

"Damme! That's rich! You don't even ask the price, young woman."

"Go along with such talk," replied the girl, an ominous light showing in her gray eyes. "I've got to have that stuff, mister, no matter what the price is. Here come my men now. They couldn't even keep up with me, Stephen."

"Few can, Lavinia," he ruefully muttered.

A tattered derelict and a tall man with waistlong whiskers, came up. The Cathrood girl directed:

"Captain Battle, you and Bummer get this stuff to the tent. Don't you take your eyes off from it."

She glanced suspiciously around the half circle of speculators. Then with a smile and a bob of the curls to Joyce she hurried back to the cotton cloth town.

"Gentlemen, I was a captain in the battle of Monterey," announced the man with the waistlong whiskers. "I slaughtered the enemy then, and I can do it ag'in, if any one tries to steal the little lady's grub."

"I ain't named after the Mexican War, and I ain't stealing grub. Just trying to buy some," petulantly announced the high bidder. "If you've finished favoring petticoats, mister, s'pose we dicker. I'll give four thousand for what's left after the young woman's portion is taken out."

"Done!" briskly agreed Joyce. "The young lady comes from my State. We Tennessee folks are sort of clannish."

He stepped aside with the purchaser and received his pay in gold dust. Turning back to Miss Lavinia's men, he warned:

"One of you always be watching this stuff until it's lodged in the tent. You'll be responsible, Mr. Battle."

The man's eyes betrayed his irritation. He heavily explained:

"As a captain in the battle of Monterey I proved my metal, young man. My name's Edgerly. But along of my war record I'm usually called Captain Battle. Always 'Captain' and never 'mister' ".

"All right, Captain. Only Americans on guard today."

With a grin and a nod Joyce hastened to enter the town of cloth, carrying his heavy bags of dust in his two hands.

It was more of a town than he had supposed; for there were several streets each straggling away for a mile, and they appeared to be well lined with houses and stores, hotels and saloons, gambling places and hurdy gurdies. Crude signs indicated the nature of each shelter, while the interminable fiddling advertised the hurdy gurdies. The various structures were very dissimilar in size and shape; but practically all were of the same flimsy material.

The Civil War was a year old and gold hunters had brought their political passions with them. Those who had wintered in the country were receiving their first news of half a year's momentous history. A drunken man reeled against Joyce and hurrahed for Jeff Davis. Joyce eyed him with disgust and flushed under his heavy tan. For he, too, was a Southerner and a Davis man, and like the drunkard was far from the fighting.

"About the only difference between me and that bum is that I'm sober," he muttered.

But there were thousands of Southern men in the territory, digging gold; just as there were thousands of northern men who cheered for Abe Lincoln and continued their feverish quest for the precious metal.

It was a glimpse of Eugene Cathrood, standing in the opening of a cloth wall, that told Joyce his search had ended. Young Cathrood was seventeen and inclined to wildness. His handsome face lighted as he beheld Joyce, and he ran forward to shake hands. Joyce was quite his ideal of a man. He was impatient for his sister to form the same high estimate. He believed that any one with half an eye could see Joyce was head over heels in his infatuation.

Pumping Joyce's hands energetically, he cried:

"That grub sure saved our bacon, Steve. Come in! Come in!"

Joyce held back, now he had arrived, and protested:

"But Lavinia will think I've come for my pay. No hurry about that. At the end of the season will be time enough."

Eugene grinned knowingly. He advised:

"The little time we've been here has taught me to grab what you can get when you can get it. But we've done well. We're pretty well fixed. In time we'll have a wooden house, and all the fixings."

"Come along, Stephen Joyce. Your money's waiting," called the girl from the other side of the cloth wall.

SHE WAS just inside the entrance, at a table fashioned out of three slabs. Before her were scales and a bag of dust. She insisted on paying at once, and without further prompting he figured the provisions at cost and vowed he was taking more than a moderate profit. She was suspicious, but he was very convincing as he explained how accumulated shiploads of provisions had knocked the bottom out of the market in Portland. He pocketed his dust and would have lingered had not the girl directed her brother to take her place while she attended to some cooking problem.

Joyce talked with young Cathrood for a few moments and then proceeded to Tracy & Company, engaged in a general freighting and forwarding business, and left all but a thousand dollars of his dust to be forwarded to his credit in Portland. After this bit of business was transacted Mr. Tracy said:

"We plan to establish a pony express service to the Salmon River diggings, with a seventy-five miles route at first. We shall need good men. Men who aren't scared of the rough scum that's drifting in here and down on the Salmon. You look like a man who could fill one of our saddles mighty well, Joyce, and you'd find some excellent chances to do a good stroke of business on the side."

"Yes, I can ride well," readily admitted Joyce. "And I reckon one honest man, with the shooting knack, can scare off half a dozen of those murderous rats. It's a game that appeals to me. But I'm not open to an offer just yet."

With the bulk of the gold off his hands he felt at leisure to take in the sights. Auctioneers, with raucous voices, were proclaiming the excellence of their wares on every street corner. Carts were bumping and rattling into and out of the town. Bands of miners, mounted and afoot, were arriving and departing on the eternal errand of wrestling wealth from the ground. Men on fleet horses raced up and down the streets, finding amusement in endangering the lives of pedestrians. Blanketed and painted Indians relieved the monotony of rough garbed whites. The tawdy finery of the dancing girls, paraded before the numerous hurdy-gurdies at regular intervals, gave flashes of color and of merriment. Piercing the babel of sounds persisted the shrill insistence of the fiddlers' music.

A revolver went off somewhere, and there was a general ducking and shrinking by those who remembered there were but few wooden walls to intercept a bullet. Joyce involuntarily dodged and bumped into a man behind him.

"Just arrived and looking around a bit," spoke a pleasant voice over his shoulder.

Joyce wheeled about and at once was warmly shaking hands with a well dressed man and saying:

"Henry Plummer! I'm glad to see you again. When did you come up?"

"I've been here quite a while, Stephen. I'm late in keeping an appointment. Look in at the Miner's Rest this evening. I shall be there. Any game you want."

Plummer readily assented and Plummer hurried away. The two had met in gaming places in Portland. Joyce had been impressed by the gentlemanly appearing man of dignified deportment. He considered Plummer to be one of the few square gamblers he had met. He felt doubly lucky in running across the man and the Cathroods. Filled with optimism, due to young manhood and the spring air, plus the profitable trading venture, Joyce wandered about the town of cloth and found life to his liking. He paused at various groups of miners and picked up what information he could. His keen mind quickly sifted the chaff from the wheat and he became convinced that the new Salmon River diggings would be the gold sensation of the summer. Also it was a Confederate day in town. Southern sympathizers were parading the streets and singing and firing pistols, and Joyce was a Disunion man. He knew the morrow might bring belated news of a Union victory, when those now shouting and celebrating would be sullen onlookers.

His pleasant mood was spoiled as he again halted at the entrance of the Cathrood eating-place and was wrathfully informed by Lavinia Cathrood:

"All my flour and other fixings have been stolen. Some men got Captain Battle aside to tell the story of his soldiering in the Mexican war, while some one gave Bummer a bottle. When the Captain finished winning the war Bummer was drunk and the stuff was gone."

Captain Battle, nervously fingering his long beard, meekly offered from the background:

"I could swear my back wasn't turned more'n two minutes, I'd take my oath Bummer was sober as a king. I'll vow—"

"Go along! Go along!" wrathfully interrupted the girl. "A pretty way to pay me for looking after you!"

Joyce was filled with a terrible rage. Not because thieves had profited by the negligence of the two men. That was to be expected. But he was infuriated to know any living creature should hurt Lavinia Cathrood. Yet he managed a quizzical smile as he lightly assured the troubled girl:

"I'll look it up for you, Lavinia. The stuff is all marked. Captain, you get a cart and be ready to do some freighting."

"Look here, Stephen Joyce," cried the girl. "It won't do. We'll take our licking. But after selling me the stuff below the market price you sha'n't risk your life in trying to corral a bunch of miserable thieves."

He grinned broadly and assured her.

"Not a bit of risk. Miserable thieves won't put up any fight. This time, Captain, you stick on guard. And get a cart."

Before the girl could remonstrate further he was swinging away, his thumbs hooked in his belt.

A short distance below the eating place he passed between a store and a saloon and turned to follow along the rear of the various structures. Within a quarter of a mile of the Cathrood place, and on the same side of the street, he paused to look into the cook room of a restaurant and found himself glaring at a mound of bags of flour. Each bag bore his mark. As he stared a Mexican entered and began arranging the bags in a tier on a layer of poles. Then he noted other supplies bearing his name and mark. He considered this neglect to remove the telltale marks as so much insolence. He entered and caused the Mexican to jump convulsively by clamping a heavy hand on his shoulder. He swung the man around, and stared venomously into the dark face, without a word spun the man about again and pushed him beyond the curtain that separated the cook room from the dining room. The man squawked wildly. A short, thick set man near the entrance came running toward them, loudly bawling—

"What'n hell you reckon you're doin' with my greaser?"

"I've come for the flour and other stuff you stole down at the landing. For all the stuff marked 'Stephen Joyce.' That's me. Flour, bacon, beans, peas. You parade all the stolen goods out front of this shebang mighty quick. My cart will pick it up."

After an explosion of wild profanity the proprietor of the place dropped a hand on a gun and fiercely demanded—

"Will you vamoose, or stick and eat lead?"

He scarcely had finished his query before the muzzle of a .45 was jammed against his stomach, and the Southerner was warning:

"Tell the greaser to pile the stuff out front. And be smart about it."

"By God! You can't rob me in broad daylight!" bellowed the proprietor.

"You thieving hound! I'll kill you in broad daylight inside of ten seconds if the goods down't start for the street," hissed Joyce.

The man held his breath, his eyes dilated. Then he spoke in Spanish and the Mexican darted behind the curtain and reappeared with a bag of flour. Joyce plucked the gun from the proprietor's belt and tossed it behind him and belted his own weapon. With the girl's list in one hand and with his right hand on his gun he proceeded to check off. The few diners in the place watched the scene curiously, but did not cease eating, except for one man who rose and sidled from the place as if fearing to catch a bullet.

Joyce marched the proprietor to the entrance and looked over the milling throng in search of Captain Battle. He saw him, standing in a cart. He raised his hat and waved it to attract the old man's attention. The hero of Monterey did not attach any significance to the gesture if he saw it.

Joyce glanced aside at his prisoner and detected a smile on the thick lips. He softly warned—

"If any one chips in you'll be the first to hear the harps."

"You don't dast murder me in cold blood," hoarsely replied the man. "I'm offered goods and I buy them. You say they be yours, that your name's on 'em. How do I know but what you stole 'em?"

"You tell the greaser there's two more bags of flour to come," ordered Joyce, and moved as if to draw a gun.

The man barked at the Mexican, who was bringing bacon. The flour deficit was made good. Reading down the list, with the proprietor repeating his words to the Mexican, Joyce held his position until all the goods were piled in the street outside the entrance.

Trembling with rage, the man hoarsely demanded—

"Now be you finished with me?"

"Until I find more stolen goods in your place. Yes."

"All right. But here comes some friends of mine, who might want to ask you some questions about your highfalutin ways," said the proprietor.

As he finished the sentence he suddenly ducked back inside the dining room. Joyce glanced about the milling crowd and discovered three desperate looking men who were violently forcing a passage across the street. Joyce dropped his left hand over his second gun and darted a glance behind him. The proprietor was planning no hostile move but stood with hands on his hips, his lips parted in a grin as he waited for the denouement of the scene.

Shifting his gaze to the front Joyce watched the trio. They halted ten feet from him and one called out—

"You the feller what's honin' for flour?"

"I'm the feller. I've got the flour."

Without further parley the three men pulled their guns. The spokesman was the quicker of the three, but his weapon exploded the fraction of a second behind the shot of Joyce's right hand gun. He plunged forward on his face, shot through the heart. From inside the dining room rang a cry of anguish. The other two men separated as their leader fell, ducking behind pedestrians. Joyce backed into the eating room and found it empty, the diners having fled through the back entrance. The proprietor was writhing on the ground, his arm shattered close to the shoulder.

CHAPTER II

THE KILLER

THE TRAGEDY was Joyce's first intimation of an organized banditti in Lewiston, although ruthless men were overrunning the town. By the time he had slipped through the rear entrance of the thief's place he regretted he had not waited to explain the shooting to the gathering crowd. As he hurried along behind the houses and had time to clear his mind he came to a decision; he would find Henry Plummer and explain how it all had happened. Plummer was a profession-gambler, and, as such, mingled with the best and the worst elements.

He possessed the rare quality of attracting people to him and was well liked by all classes. Joyce knew he had influence with high and low.

Gaining the street some distance from the shooting, the Southerner commenced a canvass of the eating places and the saloons. After half an hour of searching he discovered Plummer sitting at a table with a bottle and glass before him. Before he could enter two men brushed by him and approached the gambler. One of these, young, dissipated and reckless looking, he recognized as Jack Cleveland. He had been much in Plummer's company in Portland. The second man, skeletal in appearance because of his six feet four of attenuated frame, was a stranger. This fellow obviously was in the cap, for his broken boots and odds and ends of clothing suggested castoffs taken from some dump. He halted a few feet from Plummer and waited while Cleveland talked rapidly and confidentially with the latter. Cleveland turned and spoke and the stranger advanced and shook hands with] the gambler, bending like a rusty hinge in performing the ceremony.

Joyce passed along the street a short distance and halted to wait for a more opportune time. After some twenty minutes Cleveland and his gaunt scarecrow emerged from the saloon. They walked toward Joyce and Cleveland said something which seemed to quicken his companion's interest. As they came up to him Joyce spoke to Cleveland, who halted and shook hands warmly. Without pausing the tall man passed, holding his head stiffly erect.

"I reckon you've heard about the killing," said Joyce.

"Yes. Men are talking about it. I couldn't git the drift, but I'll back your game if it comes to a show down."

Joyce never had had a good opinion of Cleveland. Now he was deciding he must have misjudged him. He earnestly explained about the stolen goods and the assault upon him while he was recovering the provisions. He scarcely had completed his description of the fight before Cleveland loudly broke in:

"Self-defense, by God! If any coot is fool enough to make trouble you can bank on my two guns."

"Thank you. I just wanted folks to know how it all happened. I'm on my way to explain to Henry Plummer. He's well liked and has lots of influence here."

"Fine idea. Henry will back your game to the limit. He gambles with all the big guns. But don't think for a minute any trouble will be made about it. The dead man's friends now know you can shoot and will shoot."

With that they parted and Joyce hurried to catch Plummer. The latter was at the table and alone. His face beamed with cordiality as Joyce approached. He kicked out a stool and halted a waiter and took a glass from his hand. Joyce poured a drink and abruptly announced—

"I killed a man about an hour ago."

"Heard something about," quietly said Plummer. "I'll bet he needed killing."

Joyce gave the details and added:

"But if the town gets the idea I'm shooting folks promisc'us they'll have my hide. I wanted to stop that notion from spreading. I've come to you, Henry, in hopes you would pass the word to the effect I'm no fire eater, no trouble hunter. I'm convinced that once the people understand how it all happened they'll approve. If they don't understand, they may do for me in a hurry."

"Joyce, don't you worry a bit," emphatically said Plummer. "Go along about your business as if nothing had happened. Killings have been quite plenty here, and no one's got hot under the collar yet. I know all the solid citizens. I'll vouch for you. If any of the roughs try to run a bluff on you just beat 'em to the draw and the town will be deeper in your debt. Come to the Miner's Rest tonight and I'll make you known to some worthwhile folks."

This talk left Joyce in a much better frame of mind. He started for the Cathrood place to see if the provisions had been delivered. He was stopped by Tracy, who enthusiastically greeted:

"Heard the good news about you making that scum give back the grub. Now I know you're just the man for our new pony express."

"You heard I had to kill a man?"

"That was the best part of the news! Too much lawlessness here in Lewiston. We must organize a vigilance committee. We're talking it up now. But a few more shootings like yours and we won't need any committee. Drop in and see us."

Joyce's worry had dropped from him when he continued to the Cathroods' place. His spirits were somewhat dampened by Lavinia's sorrowful mien as she greeted him, saying:

"I'm mighty sorry, Stephen Joyce, to have to fetch a killing on you. I'd rather lost the goods."

"Nonsense," he somewhat gruffly replied. "The man I shot wasn't worth a side of bacon. The robbery was planned. My death was planned. If the villains had succeeded in their barefaced robbery they'd steal everything in town. They'd come here and openly take all your dust. You needn't feel sorry about anything that's happened. The rascals will think twice before stealing again; stealing, at least, in broad daylight."

"But the man's friends will try to kill," she whispered, her brown eyes wide with fear.

"I'm not a bit afraid of that, Lavinia," he confidently replied. "I'm never afraid of thieves. It's the decent element I'm afraid of, honest men who might get the idea I'm a bully and decide to wipe me out. However, I'm guarded against that danger. Tracy, the freighter, just told me every one will understand the how of it. And Henry Plummer, who knows everybody in town, will explain just how it all happened."

The girl frowned slightly.

"Mr. Plummer comes here to eat quite often. He's very popular. But I don't like him. There must be a hard, cruel streak in his makeup."

"Why, Lavinia, how can you know that?" he exclaimed.

She hesitated and glanced warily about as if guarding against eavesdroppers, and then murmured—

"There's a woman."

He stared blankly. She continued:

"The woman came here with him a year ago. Supposed to be his wife. She's here now, but not with him. It's worse than a million deaths to her."

Joyce, a most chivalrous man, wrinkled his brows in perplexity and disgust. He demurred:

"But how can you know Plummer is all to blame. Women do quit their husbands sometimes."

Lavinia shook her head and angrily denounced:

"He stole another man's wife; then abandoned her. Captain Battle knows all about it."

"If that's true it's very bad," agreed Joyce. "But the Captain's knowledge may be on a level with his experience in the Mexican War. However, Plummer stands well with the people here. What he does for me is what any man, not a scoundrel, would do gladly even for a stranger. If I am criticized in his hearing he will simply tell the truth; that I was attacked by three men with drawn guns after I had disarmed the fourth man, a thief caught with stolen property.

She changed the subject abruptly by asking—

"You'll be going down to the Salmon diggings soon?"

"May take a pack train down there. But I'm staying here until it's plain to everyone I'm not running away. Tracy wants me to ride his new express line down to the Salmon. I can't accept. No chance for big money. I'd rather speculate in food stuffs and buy gold. Well, Lavinia, I must be going. Suppose you'll feed me at suppertime?"

"On the very best we can cook out of the provisions we bought from you," she heartily assured him. Then she sadly announced, "Eugene is troubling me. He's gambling."

"How much has the young idiot lost?"

"He's won. That's worse. He works as if counting the minutes until the supper rush is over. That mad to get to the tables."

"Well, well; don't fret. He'll go broke and quit. I'd speak to him, but he'd resent it. And I want your brother to be my friend."

"He's a great admirer of yours," she told him. "I was wondering if he couldn't go along with you if you happened to go down to the Salmon."

"I'll hire him. Glad to," he readily replied. Then he reminded, "But I reckon he'll need to travel farther than the Salmon to run away from temptation, if that's what you're aiming at, Lavinia."

"Well, perhaps I'm foolish with all my half-plans. We won't decide anything in a hurry."

She smiled and nodded as he left her, but there was great sadness in his eyes.

Anything causing sorrow to Lavinia Cathrood keenly troubled Joyce. To himself he roundly denounced the youth as a "young fool." Then he decided this, coming from him, was unjust. He gambled. Nearly every one in the territory gambled. It was not considered to be a vice. But there abided an uneasiness, a fear lest the boys's admiration of him might feed the lust for gaming. He turned his steps toward the river landing to ascertain if another cargo, consigned to him, had arrived.

HE EMERGED from his brooding when he saw the tall, thin man Cleveland had presented to Plummer. It was the complete metamorphosis that caught his gaze. Had it not been for the stranger's extreme height and slim build he could not have recognized him. Gone were the broken boots and in their place were new, shiny ones. The filthy garments had followed the boots. The long coat with brown velvet collar, buttoned the full length and accentuating the thin, wiry form, was fresh from some merchant's stock. The trousers, of gay checks, was the only discord in what otherwise was a funereal garb. The hair was still worn long and fell to the shoulders, but it had been combed and trimmed, as had been the beard. A new stovepipe hat completed the entire change in appearance. The stranger was alone and even as Joyce was marking him he moved with long strides, suggesting a man on stilts, among the nearest houses.

The captain of the small steamboat on which Joyce and his cargo had arrived genially called out:

"How's tricks? Heard you potted a bad man. Hope it's true."

Joyce briefly explained the circumstances. The captain rubbed his hands approvingly, and loudly endorsed:

"Good. Good work. Only I'd hoped it was Killer Joe when I heard about it."

"Who's Killer Joe?"

"Just what he's called. A killer. He's thrown in with different gangs, but as he's more fond of killing folks than he is of running off stock and holding up stages, he don't stay long with an outfit. A gang of thieves will take him in and stake him, but no gang wants him for long. He just wanders around. One of the boys was saying he's sure he saw him in town."

Joyce paused to ask if any word had come up the river about the movement of freight. The captain had heard no river news as no other boats had arrived. Joyce remained, idly chatting, until sundown. He went to the Cathrood place for his supper, but found no opportunity to talk with the girl. She found time to give him a nod and a smile as he paid for his meal and then the hungry throng was demanding all her attention. He walked the streets and visited the stores and learned what goods were in most demand and made memoranda of the merchants' talk. Several of the traders had learned he was the slayer of the rough, and all these heartily endorsed the homicide. He was in excellent humor when he entered the Miner's Rest.

Although the hour was early the different bank games were being well patronized. He played at the monte table for an hour and won two hundred dollars.

As he rose to change his game young Cathrood seized his hand and shook it vigorously. Joyce was saddened. The youngster had his sister's eyes, and excitement had flushed his smooth cheeks to increase the resemblance. He eagerly said:

"I watched the way you shifted from the top to the bottom layout, Steve. It was mighty slick the way you picked the winning cards. Now I'm going to make some easy money. Think of working all day slinging hash when an hour's luck in here will fetch me twice as much as we take in during a day!"

"But somehow the money you make at your tables last longer than the money you may make at these tables," murmured Joyce.

The youth laughed derisively and insisted—

"Money's money."

"Lavinia will sure feel mighty sorry if you keep this up, Gene."

The boy's face flushed hotly. He coldly reminded:

"I'm doing a man's work, Why shouldn't I have some of a man's fun?"

"Ah, if it were fun," mumbled Joyce.

"Well, anyway, Steve, you're not the one to do any preaching."

"No, Gene. I won't preach," sighed Joyce, as he turned to the faro layout.

With varying luck Joyce placed his bets, his mind divided between the game and the youngster at the monte table behind him. After nearly an hour of play he rose several hundred dollars loser and looked around for young Cathrood. He saw Captain Battle and joined him, and asked—

"See Gene when you came in?"

"Met him outside. Younker was down in the mouth. Lost all his dust. Good land! When I was his age I could tackle any game from eucher to grizzly b'ar, and always win. But they don't raise that kind nowadays."

"Went broke, eh?" murmured Joyce.

He left the captain to find the youth, intending to make good his losses on condition he return to his sister.

As he reached the door young Cathrood almost collided with him. Joyce stepped back and was surprised at the animation in the young face. The brown eyes sparkled and he was smiling as if vastly pleased. Joyce greeted—

"How's your luck?"

"Big run of luck. Met a friend, a regular man. He knew I was broke, or I would never be quitting so early. Without me saying a word he pulled out his poke and made me take two hundred dollars so I could win back my losses. All over with scarce a word spoken. Now I'm going to show 'em playing that is playing."

"Just a second, Gene. Who is your good friend?"

"Henry Plummer. Square gambler, and the kindest hearted man in Lewiston."

Joyce slowly nodded and mumbled:

"Yes, Henry is all right. But pay him back out of your first winnings."

"Damn you, Steve! Think I'd cheat a man out of my grubstake?" fiercely demanded Cathrood.

"Tut, tut, Gene. Not the way to talk to your friend. Of course you'll pay your debt. I said out of your *first* winnings."

"Say it any way you want to, Steve, but I can't see it's any of your business."

Joyce flushed. He frankly admitted:

"It isn't, Gene. I apologize. I was let into it because I'm always wishing you well."

Somewhat mollified, yet inclined to be disgruntled, Cathrood said:

"It's all right. You did us a good turn today. You did us a good turn, several of them, down country. But I have feelings just like any other human being."

"Of course you have. We both mean better than we seem to pan out."

Now completely won back to his old sense of admiration and liking, the youth earnestly said:

"You've panned out top high ever since Lavinia'n me knew you. Say anything you want to, Steve. If I get hot under the collar it won't last. Now I'm going to show folks how to play faro. Thought up a new way that's bound to win."

He went to the faro table and Joyce returned to the monte layout. The latter wagered mechanically, his thoughts wandering, his gaze frequently shifting to the boy pursuing his quest for easy money.

Finally he saw Cathrood step back from the table and clench his hands convulsively and remain motionless for half a minute. He believed he read defeat and a terrible chagrin in the youngster's attitude. He hastened to cash in and join him. Cathrood spun about and walked rapidly toward the door. Joyce intercepted him and clapping a hand on the slim shoulder lightly asked—

"Well, what luck this time?"

"I quit when I had them on the run," grumbled Cathrood. "All along of that fool talk of yours! Broke a winning streak and quit just because I'd won back my losses and a little more than enough to pay Plummer! It's the shank of the evening and I'm quitting. I could have struck and busted the bank. But I quit. I'm a fool!"

"Young man, you're one of the wisest men in Idaho Territory at this particular minute. You've had some fun and you've come out ahead, and you're paying your only gambling debt."

"Yes; but you can stick and play all night and it's all right."

"If I had a single soul to feel worried about me, to be sorry, I'd never place another bet," declared Joyce in a passionate undertone.

Young Cathrood smiled skeptically and answered:

"Maybe you think that now, Steve, because you are alone in the world. Anyway, you're my friend and a good fellow. I'll pay Plummer and go home and surprise Laviny. First thing she'll say when I pull in, is, 'Come along, Gene Cathrood! What's happened that you're back this early?' "

JOYCE discovered he had lost his zest for gaming for that night, and he would have left the place if not for his promise to meet Plummer. He was surprised Plummer did not put in an appearance. To kill time he returned to the faro table. After playing for a short time he sensed some one standing close behind him. He had to crane his neck to see the tall man's face. Then he glanced down to the floor at the new boots. Without turning his head he quietly requested:

"Stranger, there's plenty of room. Will you keep back a bit?"

In a shrill nasal tone, almost a whine, came the reply—

"Stranger, this being a free country I'll stand where I please."

Joyce read fear in the lookout's face. Two wrinkles creased the brow of the dealer. Coppering the jack, Joyce casually said:

"Suit yourself, neighbor. But what might your name be?"

"It might be the name of a runaway Southern pup who didn't have guts enough to stick back home 'n' kill damn' Yanks," whined the tall man. "But it happens my name is Joe."

"And a fine, honest name!" heartily approved Joyce without shifting his gaze from the layout.

Two cards came out of the box before the tall man spoke again. Then he was informing the quiet room—

"Joe comes here to find a friend of his'n has been rubbed out by a cowardly skunk."

The players at the table began to withdraw, sensing the tragic possibilities of the situation. The lookout moistened his lips and allowed his hand to rest on the "case-keeper." Now there was plenty of room at the table, but Joe remained erect behind the lone player and pressed slightly against his back.

Joyce continued betting mechanically and was scarcely conscious of this physical contact. Again he was beholding Jack Cleveland escorting the tatterdemalion of a killer into the presence of Henry Plummer. The vision came involuntarily even as he was groping to solve the problem of facing about and drawing a gun before the man could shoot. He had no time for straightening out the confused tangle of thought prompted by Plummer's cordial reception of the man and Cleveland's liking for his company. The killer had arrived in a destitute condition, and immediately after quitting Plummer's presence he had been thoroughly outfitted from hat to boots.

The killer's thin voice broke this groping for the truth by accusing—

"An' you're the skunk who rubbed out my poor friend."

The killer was now crowding more heavily against him. Play had stopped at the other tables and the room was still except for the flap of a card from the box and the dialog between the two men. Joyce made a bet. The killer wrathfully demanded:

"Why don't you say something? Don't you dare say nothing?"

The bet was raked in and Joyce tried another and lost. Then he quietly announced—

"I'll cash in."

He stacked and counted his chips carefully, but instead of pushing them across the table he scooped them up in his two hands and threw them over his head into the killer's face, and did it with such suddenness his enemy was taken completely by surprise. Even as he was hurling the chips he half turned, slid from the stool to his knees on the floor and drew a gun. The killer had thrown up his hands spasmodically to ward off the chips, and with this second of advantage Joyce caught him under the chin with a bullet before the man could more than half draw his weapon. The tall figure swayed for a moment, then fell in a heap, the dead hand clutching the handle of the half drawn gun.

Joyce came to his feet on the opposite side of the table, both guns ready, and glared around at the startled faces. Blowing the smoke from his right-hand gun, he cried:

"You men are all witnesses of this man's attempt to kill me. All of you heard him say as much. All of you saw the advantage he took of coming up behind me. You all know he never intended to give me the shadow of a chance, but planned to murder me in cold blood. You, Jack Cleveland! Back there by the door! You saw and heard. You're a witness that this man came to murder me."

Scowling heavily, Cleveland slowly advanced and stared down at the silent figure. Then he told Joyce—

"I was just coming in when you nailed him."

"This man is Killer Joe. And you staked him to a new outfit," insisted Joyce.

Cleveland's snaky eyes half closed as he weighed the situation. He could not know that Joyce was guessing at the source of the killer's sudden prosperity. He glanced around the half circle of bearded faces, and then loudly explained:

"I never knew this feller. He was down on his luck and begged me to help him. I staked him as I've staked lots of men who were working in the cap. But I never reckoned the damn' fool was here to do any shooting. He arrived just about the time Joyce was shooting a man in front of a store. I didn't know he was packing a fight to Joyce. 'Tother man, one Joyce nailed in the street today, must 'a' been his feller's friend. Anyway, the two of 'em are dead and I'm damn' glad of it."

Joyce belted his guns and told Cleveand:

"I'll say this for you—when you stake a man you do it thorough." With that he slowly walked toward the door but halted as Henry Plummer suddenly entered. Plummer's eyes were sparkling and eager. He halted, just over threshold, and stared blankly at Joyce and the man on the floor.

"What's the trouble, Stephen? I heard a shot in here."

"Just stopped a man from killing me, Henry. A fellow Cleveland staked. You've seen him before—in Gagget's saloon this afternoon."

For a count of three Plummer appeared to be puzzled. Then he exclaimed—

"The bummer Jack staked!"

"Known as Killer Joe!" cried one of the onlookers.

"Killer Joe!" exclaimed Plummer. "Why, Stephen, you've done a mighty good job." And he seized Plummer's hand and shook it warmly. "Why, if this really is Killer Joe you've done us all a mighty fine service. I took him for just another camp bummer."

"Had me fooled," stoutly chimed in Cleveland.

CHAPTER III

A TRADING VENTURE

JOYCE'S pack train was eagerly welcomed at the new boom town of Florence in the Salmon River district. The first train through, early in May, could get no nearer than ten miles of the town, and packed in the supplies on the backs of the men at forty cents a pound. Until the trail was passable there was danger of death from starvation. Prices were much higher than at Lewiston, and Joyce quickly sold out and turned over the bulk of his gold to the Wells-Fargo company's agent. After starting his men and mules for Lewiston, intending to overtake them in a day or two, he set forth to look at the town.

The houses were of logs, hauled in on sleds. Vacant lots were fenced off, and there was the usual town optimism that Florence was to have lasting significance on all future maps of the territory. Joyce heard much enthusiastic talk among the few merchants, but he was remembering that few placer towns lived beyond three years. He gave this new community one season of feverish activity. Then would come the invariable desertion for richer diggings, and another ghost town would be added to the long list which began in California.

Four murderers had stained the history of Florence prior to Joyce's arrival, and as he wandered the length of the straggling street, pausing to talk with storekeepers, he decided the two saloons were rendezvous for the vicious. The isolation of the town and its lack of civic government made it an ideal sanctuary for desperate characters.

While the southerner was taking a drink in Cherokee Bob's saloon the proprietor regaled him by expressing hatred of the North and Northerners. He boasted of killing several garrison soldiers near Walla Walla. Finishing his tirade he told Joyce—

"You're no damn' Yank."

"Tennessee born."

"That's good! Us Southerners must stick together. You look like you could take care of yourself."

"I always have," admitted Joyce.

The breed's small eyes glittered with approval. He urged:

"Drink. My treat. Want you to know our boys here. We're all sound on the goose. You fetched in a train of grub."

"Yes. Now I must move around a bit. I'll be dropping in again."

"No news from the States?" eagerly asked the breed.

"Nothing that you haven't heard, I reckon. But the South is winning."

"You're damn' right she's winning! And I'll notch some more blue bellies afore I finish!" loudly cried the mixed blood. "But come back. Make it your stopping place. You'll find us sound." Then, leaning over the bar, he lowered his voice and added:

"We can put you in the way of getting more dust'n you'll ever git by packing grub."

Joyce always took the game as he found it. He smiled genially, finished his drink, promised to return and departed. At the upper end of the straggling street was Cyrus Skinner's saloon. He entered and Skinner was quick to wait on him and ask many questions. Skinner was a plotter and was fated to live long enough to instigate the horrible Macgruder murders. A sly rat of a man, Joyce decided, and always deadly. It was plain he knew the southerner had made a fat profit out of his pack train. In reply to leading questions Joyce rather boasted of his success; then added—

"And all my dust has been turned over to Wells-Fargo."

For a moment Skinner stared through narrowed lids at the smiling countenance, and then turned away to hand out a bottle to a man whose face was smothered with heavy black whiskers. The man said something in an undertone. Skinner's expression changed. Turning back to Joyce, he explosively asked:

"Why'n hell didn't you say you was sound? Any man Cherokee Bob vouches for is good enough for me."

Joyce hesitated. He could not confess to a liking for villainy. And yet he did not care to antagonize the lawless element by proclaiming his virtues. He commenced a noncommittal talk, speaking slowly and guardedly, as if almost inclined to speak freely, when he was interrupted by an uproar in the street. The space in front of the saloon was filled with wild horsemen, who fired revolvers and howled like wolves. Then the leader, who would have been prepossessing if it were not for the small, dull gray eyes, urged his horse through the doorway and loudly demanded a drink. His four followers likewise entered, all mounted, and glared insolently at the few men crouching back against the walls.

"Charley Harper, that ain't no way to come into my place. You and your nags have filled up the whole room," softly chided Skinner.

"Hello, old hoss fly. So this is your new dump. Brockie, take the horses outside. Cyrus, here's what you love."

He tossed a heavy buckskin bag on the bar and told the proprietor to weigh out drinks for the crowd. Then with a recklessness, that later was to be suicidal, he placed four more purses on the bar and with a leering, sidelong glance at Skinner's avaricious face he explained:

"We struck a rich pocket just outside the town. Averaged five hundred dollars to the pan."

With a deep intake of breath, then expelling it with a hissing sound, Skinner replied:

"Charley, them's the diggings I want to pan out. Here! Meet a friend of Bob's. Reckon he'll throw in with us."

Harper turned his dull gaze on Joyce and lowered at him in silence for some moments. If he expected to "look down" the Southerner he was mistaken. Turning to Skinner, he said:

"He may do for Bob, but not for me. Too young."

Joyce smiled broadly. He knew Harper could not be much, if any older than he. Harper scowled as he beheld the smile, and sharply announced:

"I'm running this outfit up here, mister. That goes whether you drink with Cy Skinner or Cherokee Bob. I'm chief. Remember that."

"And I'll say you make a very dashing, sure shooting chief," heartily said Joyce yet smiling.

"Dead right. But stop that damned grinning!"

"Oh, come now, Mr. Harper. My teeth are my own. I can show them in a grin, or in a snarl. Even you can't expect to make all the people in the territory stop smiling."

"How are you at shooting?" fiercely demanded Harper.

"Probably as good as any man you've ever seen," Joyce promptly replied, his hands dropping on his hips.

"Erhuh? That's pretty tall talk."

"I never lie about myself," gravely assured Joyce. "This is a shooting country. One needs to shoot quick and sure to get along. Ask them up in Lewiston who did for Killer Joe, when Joe got behind his man and had him dead cold, and then lost out. Jack Cleveland or Henry Plummer can tell you how Joe died."

Harper's jaw sagged for an instant. The dull eyes opened wide as in a low voice he asked—

"Name of Joyce?"

"Right. Steve Joyce."

Harper swept off his slouch hat and struck it against the bar and called to his men—

"Step up here, you hounds, and meet the feller who cashed Killer Joe's chips."

As the men pressed forward and bobbed their heads in greeting Harper continued:

"Joe always hunted alone. Just wanted to kill. Had talent and didn't use it right. Often he wouldn't have the price of a drink. Glad to meet you, Joyce, but you won't do for my gang. You'd want to be boss. But you can get together an outfit of your own and between the two of us we'll clean up this country."

He paused to glance around to make sure none was present who was not "sound," and in a lower voice eagerly resumed:

"Good God, Joyce! Do you know the pickings waiting for us here? Do you know six thousand dollars was taken out one claim in one day over in Baboon Gulch? That they're sending it out in hundred and twenty pound bags? That they weigh their dust here by the pound?"

"Sounds rich," admitted Joyce.

Cyrus Skinner leaned his trembling hands on the bar and thrust forward his vulture face to announce in an unsteady voice:

"They'll take out two million* from the Miller Crick claims this summer! Oh, if you boys would only do more walking, 'stead of wild riding! If you'd only keep your heads and play for big stakes!"

Harper laughed derisively and said—

"There'll be plenty, no matter if we walk or ride."

"Or hang," murmured Joyce.

"Hang? What the devil do you mean?" cried Harper.

"Some one's surely going to hang if you pull off daylight holdups and slam other folks' pokes down on a public bar."

"That's it! That's it!" hoarsely exclaimed Skinner. "He's got a head! He won't throw in with an outfit that tells the whole world every time it makes a haul. Big stakes is his game. One big stake is better'n a thousand little ones."

"We got three thousand dollars inside of five minutes," defended Harper.

"How many in the party?" asked Skinner.

"Five men and a boy," sullenly replied Harper.

"Where be they?" whispered Skinner.

"Hoofing it north, I suppose."

"Well, if that ain't the beatenest thing I ever heard of!" derided Skinner. "You've turned loose five mouths to tell the world what's been done and who done it! If you'd got a million you'd never left any one alive to blab. And they'd hang you for three thousand as quick as they would for a million. And in the broad daylight."

"Bah! Folks are too busy hunting gold to hunt me," said Harper, but Skinner's talk had made him uneasy.

Joyce yawned and stepped back from the bar and remarked:

"Yes, Harper, it was pretty raw. But every man to his own liking."

Harper's florid face flushed; then he was remembering the death of Killer Joe. He smiled mechanically and explained:

"Just some fun for the boys. But now we're here for real business we can be as sly as cats. But let's quit talking business and have some cards and a bottle. Poker?"

Joyce nodded. Two of Harper's men, English and Brockie, evidenced a desire to play. The four were accommodated with a rough table and stools at the rear of the low room. Joyce was wishing himself out of the place and the town. He had some five hundred dollars on his person, and he believed that all that saved him from a bloody death on the spot was his boast of having killed Killer Joe and their belief that he was friendly with Cherokee Bob. But Harper acted independently of both gangs and would have murdered Skinner or the breed if satisfied he could escape with his stealings. Even with his prestige as a man killer Joyce wished he could buy up the hours intervening between the beginning of the game and sunset.

THE PLAY from the start was reckless, with the three desperadoes overbetting their hands and laughing boisterously when they lost. The bottle was passed and quickly emptied, but Joyce only made a pretense of drinking. After an hour of play Harper slowly withdrew his hand from his pocket and held it open, palm up, and stared at it incredulously, and with a burlesque of a smile said:

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*558 men took out $2,785,000. "Resources of the Pacific Slope," J. Ross Brown.

"We'll try it tonight after supper. Up at Cherokee's. I'll have better luck up there."

English cackled shrilly and jibed:

"Chief's cleaned out."

"It's coming back to him mighty soon," muttered Harper.

"Keep sober when you play cards, Harper. Trust to your wits, not to whisky luck," harshly advised Skinner.

"Good talk for a man selling rum," jeered Harper.

"Good talk for a man selling anything," snapped Skinner.

Joyce started for the door, but Harper halted him.

"You'll be on hand tonight at Bob's. You've got to give me my revenge."

"Surely, if nothing comes up to prevent," was the careless reply. "I enjoy the game." And with a nod Joyce passed out into the street.

Across from the saloon was the store of Allen Matheson, who had bought heavily from the pack train. Joyce entered the store and Matheson eyed him curiously. Joyce went to the back of the room and waited until the proprietor had finished with a customer and could join him.

Joyce told him:

"My saddle is here. My horse is in the corral a few rods up the street. I want you to do me a great favor. After it gets dark I want you to fetch the horse back of your store and saddle him. I must ride quick and sudden."

"You'll be lucky to ride in any fashion if Skinner's outfit learns you have any gold on your person," warned the storekeeper.

Joyce briefly recounted his experience in the saloon, and explained:

"The whole town knows I sold a lot of stuff. If I'd been wise I would have gone along with the mules. Skinner will hold off so long as he thinks I'm a friend of Cherokee Bob's. Harper won't make a move when I have a show to defend myself, because he knows I killed Killer Joe. I've gambled with them in a fight for time. They'll jump me in a second if I try to leave before dark."

"Joyce, I'm ashamed to say I thought you were blowing in your dust on those cutthroats," said Matheson. "I'll get your horse down here after dark and have him saddled and waiting."

"You must run no risk on my account. If the gang should learn you fetched the horse they would have it in for you. Leave the saddle out back."

"No, no. I'll do it. I know the corral keeper. He'll keep his mouth shut. I earnestly advise you to pull out at the earliest possible time."

With this plan agreed upon they walked toward the front of the store and Joyce would have taken to the street had not Matheson suddenly seized his arm and pulled him back. A horseman was slowly passing. The merchant whispered—

"There's one as bloody as any in the territory."

"Jack Cleveland!" exclaimed Joyce softly. "One of the last men I care to meet down here. He outfitted Killer Joe. I believe Joe was to pay for his new clothes by rubbing me out."

"I don't like it, Joyce. Cleveland knew you were bringing a pack train here. He gives you time to sell your goods and then appears. A long ride for him to take unless he's on the devil's business. Better stay inside here till I can fetch the horse."

"No. I must play the game, Matheson. If Cleveland's come to rob me he'll be told by Cherokee Bob that I turned over nearly all my dust to Wells-Fargo. I must run a bluff on them till it gets dark. There comes Harper out of Skinner's place. He's making for the breed's saloon. He'll be keen to stop me. I won most of his stealings. Now I'm going out. I don't want them to come looking for me. I'll call in on the other traders and then to Cherokee Bob's place—"

"Good Lord! No! Don't walk into that trap!"

"Yes. I'm not afraid of Cleveland unless he has a friend standing behind me. He's yellow unless he has all the advantage. I must bluff it out until it's dark enough to bolt."

As he left the store, Brockie walked unsteadily from Skinner's place. Joyce waved his hand and called out, "See you later," and proceeded down the street. He turned into the first eating place and from the corner of his eyes saw Harper in the middle of the street, staring after him. He hurriedly ate some meat and bread and then called on a trader in the next cabin. None of the desperadoes were in sight, but he believed sharp eyes were watching him. Had the corral been at his end of the street he would have been tempted to ride for it. That such a move would have been dangerous was proven by the sudden appearance of Harper and Cleveland racing their horses down the street. They rode to the end of the settlement and when they returned Joyce stood in the doorway and called out—

"Who won?"

"Tie," replied Harper. "Jack wants to sit in the game tonight."

"I'm feeling lucky tonight, Joyce," spoke up Cleveland.

"Fine. I always enjoy playing against a man who feels lucky. What's the news from Lewiston?"

Cleveland laughed sardonically; then replied:

"Another killing. But the richest thing is how young Cathrood bolted."

"Young Cathrood bolted?" exclaimed Joyce. "Did he kill some one?"

"Young fool lost his money bucking the tiger the night after you pulled out and was almost caught trying to rob the strong box at the Miner's Rest. Besly the watchman found him in the gaming room long towards morning. He gave the alarm. Posse went to the eating place and he'd skipped."

Joyce's heart sank, and for a moment he felt helpless. Then he was fiercely resenting the charge against his young friend. "I don't believe he ever tried any such fool game, Cleveland. He's a fool when it comes to gambling. But he never did anything dishonorable."

"Bah. The young pup was busted and desperate. Prob'ly half drunk. Must have been to think he could get any cash from the Rest. But that won't help him any if a Lewiston mob catches him."

"But this Besly's no snow white character. The boy hasn't told his story yet."

"No. He ran away. Besly said he was there thinking to steal."

"I'll bet you a hundred I can make Besly eat his words."

"I'll bet you a hundred you don't," snarled Cleveland.

"All right. I'll be starting back in a few days. The boy has acted foolish, but he's no thief."

Cleveland laughed and replied—

"Well, his pretty sister ain't trying to find him."

Joyce saw red for a moment, but managed to control himself. He quietly said:

"I'll find him and fetch him back to Lewiston." Then he somberly added, "That is, if the poor boy hasn't been murdered."

"Murdered? Who'd bother to kill the brat?"

"I don't know, now that Killer Joe has passed on. But I can stand in any street in Lewiston and throw my hat and hit a man who would kill him for the price of a drink."

Cleveland started slightly at the mention of Killer Joe. Harper impatiently broke in, saying:

"Too much talk. Sun soon will be down. Big game ahead at Bob's place. If the kid had made good in looting the Miner's Rest I'd send for him to throw in with me. I was telling Jack you might throw in with some of us down here, but he says no."

"Why?" asked Joyce.

"He says you won't throw in with any outfit you can't boss."

"I'll tell him now, Joyce, that you won't throw in for a free and easy life because you talk too much about 'honor' and such like," jeered Cleveland.

"All right. Be a mind reader and know everything. I'll join you at sundown and we'll see if you can read my cards."

He turned from them and felt a cold chill ripple up and down his spine in anticipation of a bullet. Then came the reassuring clatter of hoofs as the two men rode up the street.

Cleveland's appearance was most disquieting. Only some errand of importance could call him such a distance from the demoralizing pleasures of Lewiston. Joyce believed the explanation was to be found in his pack train profits, and again he ardently wished his horse were at the west end of the town. His promised visit to Cherokee Bob's saloon suddenly had become a vastly more dangerous proposition. To meet and game with Harper's band and steal away and ride for it under the cover of darkness had not impressed him as being extremely hazardous. Cleveland's coming changed all that.

HE REACHED the end of the street and found himself encouraging a notion of proceeding behind the houses to the back of the corral and obtaining his horse before any alarm could be given. He estimated the time the low sun would take in losing its balance and sinking behind the Blue Mountain Range. In the entire history of the West there was no terrain presenting more travel difficulties to pioneers than the mining districts in the western part of the territory. The extensive mountainous surface was eccentrically broken by sheer precipices, deep cañons, impassable streams, and extensive lava beds. Even Indian trails were almost impassable. A race would be to the lucky, and not to the swift.

He started, as if to walk to the last house, but halted as he heard the drumming of hoofs. He remained with his back to the road until the horsemen were close. Then he turned about lazily and beheld Brockie, English and Cleveland.

"Hi! Gone to sleep?" yelled Brockie, as the three reined in their horses.

"Just admiring the scenery," he answered as he sauntered back to the road.

"The sun will be down inside twenty minutes. Cherokee is about to dish up the grub. The boys say you're eating with us," said Cleveland.

"I'd planned on it. A man wouldn't choose to eat alone in this God forsaken country."

The men walked their horses up the street, Joyce keeping at Cleveland's stirrup. Brockie loudly insisted he had won the race. Joyce knew the racing was not for drunken wagers, but to permit espionage.

It was nearly dusk when they came to the saloon. Cherokee Bob called out a hearty greeting to Joyce, who boisterously responded, and made the bar free as long as fifty dollars would suffice. Charley Harper remarked he was drinking on his own money, even if it came from Joyce's poke. Besides Harper and his four men, and Cleveland, there were two tall, lean individuals who drank deep, but said little. This couple Joyce did not notice until they left the shadows at the end of the shack and came to the bar. They were introduced simply as Buck and Ben. Although used to rough specimens they focused his attention by bringing rifles to the bar.

"Hunters?" asked Joyce of Cleveland.

"Yes—hunters. And they fetch in rare game." Then he chuckled as if amused at some rich jest.

The supper of meat and coarse bread was served on the bar, the men standing while they ate. Joyce only made a gesture at drinking, but the others washed their food down with the villainous whisky and grew more foul mouthed and boastful. Besides Joyce the hunters were quiet. With the meal finished, candles were lighted at the end of the room and the men gathered at the table. Joyce got the notion they took their places as if having been assigned to them before his arrival. Joyce found himself seated between Cleveland and Harper. The other players were Brockie and English. Behind Joyce stood the two hunters.

All the players seemed to be plentifully supplied with gold. The limit was set at a hundred dollars with a ten dollar ante. Joyce affected high spirits and turned braggart. As if endorsing this role, luck sent the cards to him. He took the first few pots without much opposition except once when Harper and Cleveland whipsawed him to force him out. As he swept the greater part of his winnings into a big bag Harper cynically asked—

"'Fraid to keep it on the table?"

"It'll get so tall I can't see the pot. I've just started to clean up," said Joyce, skinning his hand narrowly. Then he threw back his head and sharply warned, "You man, breathing on my neck, back up!"

"You be touchy, stranger," said Buck.

"Touchy and dangerous. You two keep back. And one who wants to see this hand must pay for the privilege."

Cleveland laughed sardonically, glanced at Harper, and bet. Joyce threw down his hand. He was interested to observe the betting became perfunctory, and that Cleveland was permitted to take the pot, uncalled. On the next deal Brockie opened and Joyce made it a hundred to draw cards. All dropped except Harper, who grumbled, "You can't steal by that cheap bluff."

Joyce drew three cards to aces and caught a third ace and a small pair. He ran the pot up to a thousand dollars before Harper called and put down a flush, completed on a one card draw.

"That's the kind of a cheap bluffer I am," Joyce taunted.

Harper went to the bar and whispered a negotiation for a loan. Joyce remained quiescent for two deals; and again raised the limit for cards. Cleveland and English stayed in, but dropped when Joyce stood pat. Cleveland savagely said—

"Easy to boast when you have all the cards."

"Not for me to turn luck away when she knocked on the door," said Joyce with a smile as he thrust his hand into the discard. Brockie quickly scooped up the hand and turned it over. It was worthless. Joyce leaned forward and softly warned:

"Don't look at my hand again unless you pay. This is poker, not a peep show!"

"Huh! You're damned fussy," grumbled Brockie.

"I am. And I killed Killer Joe when he caught me at a monte table and stood behind me with .45 jammed against my back."

This braggadocio had its effect. It refreshed the recollections of every rascal in the room. "Play cards," grunted Cleveland. "And don't git nosey with a hand you ain't paid to look at, Brockie."

The game continued, Joyce plunging at times and catching them when they believed he was bluffing. The big bag was filled and another was produced. Harper laughed hoarsely and said—

"Looks like you come prepared to take all the dust in this burg out of the country."

"Some of it goes with me," quietly replied Joyce. After half a dozen hands he complained, "The smoke makes my head ache. Let's rest for a trifle. Let's step outside and get a whiff of fresh air. Cleveland, I'd like a word aside with you about young Cathrood."

THEY all rose as he kicked his stool one side. He tossed a nugget on the bar and told the proprietor, "Let me know when the boys have swallowed it."

As the men made for the bar Cleveland hung back from following Joyce, and asked—

"Is this talk to be kept private?"

"Not on my account. It concerns a big man. You can repeat it if you want to. I'll talk it right out in meeting, right here, if you want it that way."

Cleveland did not want it that way. He pushed forward to and through the door. The two hunters also stepped outside, cradling their rifles. Cleveland told them—

"You two go back and keep the boys company for a bit." Then he bruskly demanded, "What's all this mystery about, anyway? Who's the man whose name mustn't be heard?"

Joyce slowly advanced from the doorway, with Cleveland at his shoulder, and murmured:

"Nothing like that. 'Mustn't be heard' is too strong. I said you could tell the world so far as I'm concerned. I had Henry Plummer in mind as the one to square young Cathrood. You're a friend of his. He has much influence, more influence, probably, than any other man in Lewiston."

"That's a damned lie!" cried Cleveland. "You make me sick. Every one boosting Plummer! Why, he'll eat out of my hand. We came up here together from California. He'll eat out of my hand. That's all I'm saying."

"And that's amazing," said Joyce. "Why, then you're the man to square Cathrood. Walk along a bit. You're free to tell our talk if you want to. But if it is about money paid for squaring the youngster perhaps you'll want to keep it quiet. Men usually live longer and fare better the less they talk."

As he spoke he hooked his arm through Cleveland's and made the distance fifty feet from the door. The desperado jerked his arm loose and came to halt, and said—

"This is far enough."

After a backward glance Joyce said:

"Those hunters are outdoors again. Better tell them to stay where they are."

"They ain't used to being told where they can go and can't go. Why you so crazy about the kid? Along of his pretty sister?"

"The boy's from the South, my State," harshly replied Joyce. "Leave his relations out of the talk. If you're bigger than Plummer, what's your price for squaring this game some one's worked on him?"

Cleveland chuckled. He was silent for a few seconds and then said:

"I think your profits on the grub you fetched to Lewiston, and your profits on the stuff you fetched down here, would be about right. Ben 'n' Buck back there shall witness our bargain." And he turned to speak to the hunters.

He winced as he felt the muzzle of a gun pressing against his left side.

"Tell them to keep back," warned Joyce.

The gun dug in deeper. He hoarsely cried:

"You Ben, and Buck, keep back. Don't come tagging."

He felt Joyce's free hand removing his guns; then he was being escorted rapidly down the road. Trembling with fury, he said:

"I don't know your game, but, by God! You'll pay high for this funny business."

"But I know your game, you dog!" hissed Joyce. "Ahead of me, in back of this house. If any one comes along to see what's up I'll kill you just as surely as I believe you knew Killer Joe was planning to do for me."

Without a word Cleveland walked back of Matheson's store. A horse whinnied. Joyce spoke soothingly and removed the pressure of the gun from Cleveland's side as he unfastened the halter. Cleveland gave a loud scream and thrust his hand under his coat to secure the knife Joyce had overlooked. The heavy gun rose and the heavy barrel landed on Cleveland's head. He fell like one hit by lightning.

CHAPTER IV

JOYCE RIDES ALONE

ALTHOUGH his absence from Lewiston had been brief, Joyce, riding in from the south at the head of his pack-animals, quickly decided the population was considerably larger and that desperadoes and cutthroats supplied a good half of the transient citizenry.* More pole and cloth structures were up, and the reports from the Salmon diggings were causing a migration madness. Only in North America during a gold rush could such scenes be witnessed. Not only was there constant pouring forth of the gold hungry, and an equally avid incoming over the Walla Walla road and by small boats, but there was seething of the sediment remaining in camp which was new to the Southerner. It seemed as if crimes of violence had doubled almost over night. Galloping horsemen, rattling carts, eager prospectors mounted and afoot kept the streets in an uproar.

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*An old settler in Lewiston, writing later in 1862, said seventy-five per cent. of the population were cut throats.

The cacophony of hurdy gurdy fiddles, punctuated by the barking of an increased number of auctioneers, fairly deafened the ears. There was no confining or dulling the tremendous discords in a city of cloth walls. Drunken miners, back from risking their lives in the diggings, were emptying their pokes of dust among the vicious. Small fortunes were being squandered almost hourly. These were ever being trailed by gamblers, thugs and dancehall girls. No vice lacked representation.

After stabling his horse in a tent on the outskirts of the town, and leaving a man to guard the animal, Joyce turned his pack animals out to graze under a suitable guard. Then he set forth to find Plummer. He found him in a saloon on a side street, sharing a bottle of whisky with what appeared to be an Indian, as the man was robed and painted. A closer inspection revealed the fellow to be a white man. Plummer started violently when he heard Joyce's salutation. He twisted about quickly and for a moment appeared to be confused. His companion lowered heavily and hoarsely demanded—

"Who is he?"

"Steve Joyce, by all that's good! Welcome back. Mighty glad to see you. You gave me quite a start, as I was positive you were down on the Salmon. What luck?"

"Fine. Couldn't ask for better."

"Town sort of rough, I suppose?"

"Oh, just like all these towns. I returned before I planned to as I wanted to have a talk with you."

He paused and glanced inquiringly at the nondescript figure across the table.

"This is a friend of mine, Bill Bunton. Good fellow but a bit foolish at times. He thinks some one is chasing him, so he put on this silly disguise."

"Howdy, Bunton. You look the part."

"Howdy, mister," mumbled Bunton, horsethief and murderer. "I'll see you again, Henry."

As he shuffled from the tent Joyce stared after him with knitted brows for a moment. Then he exclaimed:

"Thought the name was familiar. I've placed him. He was accused of murder in Walla Walla."

"He was tried and duly acquitted," smoothly added Plummer. "Rough fellow, but with many fine qualities. What's on your mind, Steve?"

Joyce took a seat and briefly repeated what Cleveland had told him about young Cathrood. For the first time he beheld Plummer in a rage. For half a minute the man sat perfectly still and appeared to be holding his breath, his face flushing highly as if from congested blood. Then in a low, vibrant voice he broke forth in a torrent of horrible oaths, all directed against Cleveland. Joyce was amazed. It was a side of Plummer's nature he never had suspected.

Catching himself up, Plummer apologized for his language by saying:

"That man makes me see red, Joyce. The low down, miserable hound. I've staked that man to all he's eaten, and worn, and thrown away at the tables for more than a year just because we were together in the mines in California, and were traveling companion up here. Some day my patience will be exhausted."

"I've no use for him," quietly said Joyce. "He tried to do for me in Florence. After my pack train money, probably." He described his manner of leaving town.

Plummer's eyes glistened, and his voice was low and vibrant as he asked:

"Bent a gun over his head, hey? But did you rub him out?"

"Probably not. I don't know. Yet he was quiet enough when I left him. But what about young Cathrood?"

Plummer pursed his lips thoughtfully and slowly replied:

"I don't know just what to think. I can't understand his running away without coming to me. He knew I liked him, that I had been friendly to him, that I had staked him and was willing to stake him again. Besly says he caught him in the gaming room after the place was closed, trying to open a stout chest, thinking it contained money. Seems queer he should get such a silly notion that the money was left in a wooden chest. Of course he was young and might be foolish enough to believe that. Besly says he caught hold of his arm, that the boy broke away and ran for it. It was near morning and Besly waited till daylight before spreading the word. When I heard the news I didn't believe it, couldn't believe it. But search the town as I would I couldn't find the lad. I called on his sister. She was short and uppity in the few words she gave me. Seems to have a grudge against me. Probably thinks I taught the cub to gamble. She was alarmed, I could see that. I tried to make her think he would be back shortly and give a perfectly good explanation why he happened to visit the Miner's Rest after hours. But on the other hand we have to think of this: If he hasn't been up to something why did he pull out?"

"He may have been murdered."

Plummer was startled by the suggestion. He shook his head and countered:

"By whom, and for what? Where's the body? It isn't in Lewiston. He's gone away. Disappeared. Why?"

With a heavy sigh Joyce said:

"I'm through guessing. It's all very blind. I had hoped you'd have the know of it. Well, I'll be trotting along."

Plummer accompanied him to the exit and earnestly assured, "Wish I did know. I liked the youngster, even if his sister always treated me uppity. I'm betting he got tired of petticoat government, and simply bolted. He may have been broke and was ashamed of asking for a stake he couldn't pay back. Being young he may have been thrown off his balance by gaming losses, and forced to decide to cut loose for a new town. He may have wandered to the Miner's Rest, hoping to find me, or some other friend, to stake him. He may have been drunk—"

"No, no. That's a weakness he isn't guilty of," hastily broke in Joyce.

Their conversation was halted by loud cheering and the explosion of many revolvers in the next street. Between the canvas structures they could glimpse milling masses of men. Plummer remarked—

"A Northern or Southern victory?"

"Southern!" cried Joyce after hearing a hoarse chorus bawling, "Hooray for Jeff Davis!"

"Three days ago the North was celebrating and owning the streets. Let me know what you learn. Perhaps Miss Cathrood knows where the boy is, but doesn't care to tell. If I can do anything to help, just holler. If Besly hadn't talked before I learned what was in the wind I'd closed his trap."

"Figure it any way you can you have to think the boy is a fool to vanish like this," said Joyce dejectedly.

Plummer straightened and stared sharply between two houses. Two tall men had halted in the narrow field of vision to watch the celebration. They were lean of build and wore soiled buckskins and fur hats, and carried rifles. Joyce was also quick to perceive them. He loudly shouted:

"Oh, Ben! Oh, Buck!"

They pivoted about instantly and after one glance passed from sight. In surprise Plummer asked—

"You know them?"

"I forgot to mention them. Met them in Cherokee Bob's saloon in Florence. They must be the two who followed me and fired on me at the White Bird Creek crossing eighteen miles from the Salmon. It was dark, but two rifles were fired at me. Then again, at Chapman's, near the fork, I was fired at."

"But they look to be hunters, not robbers," protested Plummer.

"I know. Cleveland said they were hunters and that they sometimes brought in 'rare game'."

"But, good land, man! Why should they follow and try to kill you? They don't look as if they were up to that kind of work."

"I had a thousand, besides what I took away from the men in the two saloons. Cleveland didn't intend I should bring it back here. Charley Harper thought the same as Cleveland. I knew I had to bolt under cover of darkness. I knew those two men acting under Cleveland's orders. And I know they followed me. So long."

"But, Joyce! Don't begin anything you can't finish," earnestly advised Plummer. "You can't go potting people up here for what you thought they intended to do to you in Florence. The town has forgotten the man you rubbed out for stealing bacon and flour. Killer Joe's finish was approved of. But if you add any more scalps to your string, unless a fight's fetched to you, the town will get nervous."

"I'm not packing a fight to them; but I feel safer if I know just where they are. I know Cleveland put them on my trail with orders to follow me to the finish, my finish."

"I've a bone to pick with Cleveland, but you must play your own hand after your own notions. Just wishing you well, that's all."

With that, Plummer turned back to his table.

Joyce hurriedly crossed to the next street but found no signs of the two tall hunters. He walked to the end of the street, looking into the drinking and gambling resorts. The Disunion celebration had been shifted indoors temporarily, and all the bars were crowded with Southern sympathizers. Joyce failed to find them.

PASSING down to the other end of the street, searching as he went, he came to the Cathrood eating place and found Lavinia at her table. She smiled her greeting and extended both hands.

"So good to see you, Stephen," she murmured.

He held her hands for a moment and studied the oval face and noted the dark circles under her eyes. Then he bluntly asked—

"Worrying about Gene?"

She turned away for an instant, then faced him, tears blurring her eyes, and whispered:

"Still worrying. Worrying my heart out. Do you know what they say?"

"All nonsense," he gruffly told her. "I'll look him up and fetch him back."

"He isn't in town. Captain Battle and Bummer have searched it thoroughly. He isn't here, Steve. Seems like I should go crazy."

"Brace up. Play your hand. He's pulled out for some reason that he thinks is all right. I'll hit his trail and fetch him back."

"No, no!" she fiercely insisted. "They'll hang him! That man Besly—"

"I know," he gently interrupted. "But I'll have a talk with Besly. Maybe he'll discover he's mistaken. I'll bet my pile he is. The youngster's clean as a hound's tooth. Perk up and leave it to old man Joyce. Plummer said he offered to help you, by searching for Gene."

Her eyes narrowed and blazed as she replied—

"Mr. Plummer wants to be paid for his efforts."

He stared down at her in silence for half a minute, and then, with an odd little note in his voice, he demanded—

"Did he say anything he wouldn't have said if I were standing by?"

"Oh, no, no! Now don't begin building up a quarrel, Stephen. He simply wanted to be my friend. And you know I don't like him."

"I'd never looked for him to offer his help in such a way as to make it an insult," he muttered, his gaze straying to the busy street.

"Don't make any mistake. Mr. Plummer wanted to be friendly, and I can't be friendly with his kind. I can't accept favors from a man like him. Why Gene went away is a mystery. You know he never would *steal.*"

It was a challenge and he met it instantly by vowing:

"I'd stake my life on the boy being everything you'd wish outside his liking for gaming. And that's no crime, although foolish in a youngster."

"And in grown ups, Stephen Joyce," she said softly. "It's a speck in a man's character. Maybe a tiny one, but unlovely. Now I must work and you can drop in after hours and talk it all over."

"I'll find him. Don't look glum. Hold your head up. Yanks will think the South's losing."

Forgetting the curious diners she seized his hand convulsively, and her face became transfigured.

"That's it, Stephen! You've hit on the right clue. He's gone away to enlist and fight for the South. He went like this thinking to save me some heartache. He was always such a highminded little gentleman. That's it."

Joyce's lean face flushed.

"If I can find that's the truth I'll follow him, Lavinia," he whispered.

"Mr. Plummer never would do that. Now go. Folks are staring. If you find him, tell him to go to Portland and that I'll join him there."

"I'll see you before I leave town," he insisted.

He swung out into the noisy street and slowly made his way to the Miner's Rest. He wished to find Besly before the man went on duty, and, what with the early hour and the celebration, the place would be empty. The saloons were emptying into the streets and forming another parade, this time rather a drunken one. The shouting mob was moving toward the Rest, and Joyce crossed to the next street that he might arrive ahead of the noisy throng and finish his business with Besly.

He reached the rear of the gambling place and did not hesitate to enter by a back door. The place was as quiet as if deserted. The parade was milling around in front of the house, firing guns and howling like madmen. Joyce slowly moved along a short hall with walls of canvas. A man popped out from a small room directly ahead of him. One glance, and Joyce had the man by the shoulder and was thrusting him back into his sleeping room. He drew a gun and placed the muzzle under the frightened creature's chin.

"Why, Mr. Joyce, what do you mean?" whispered the man.

"Then you know me, Besly?"

"As if I'd forget the man who done for Killer Joe! By why pick on me?" And Besly's teeth chattered.

"You poor fool! Hear that howling? Do you think I'm the only one who's come to pick on you?"

"My God! But I ain't done nothing!"

"You lied about young Cathrood," hissed Joyce. "If you'd save your hide you tell me the truth. The truth, or up a rope! Quick!"

"Oh, good Lord! Bill Bunton made me say that. Fetched the word to me to say it. He was speaking for a crowd that's mighty powerful in this town."

"Then it's all a lie about the boy coming here? Quick!" A salvo of guns punctuated the query.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Joyce! God help me! Killed if I tell, and killed if I don't!"

"Tell me the truth and I'll save your worthless pelt."

"I know almost nothing about what's back of it," groaned Besly. "Some one wants the boy out of Lewiston. I was to say he come here to try and steal so folks would think he run for it. God forgive me! I've worried about it ever since. Help me to get clear, to get out of town, Mr. Joyce. On my knees I beg of you—"

"Shut up!" commanded Joyce and yanking him to his feet. "Where did the boy go?"

"But I never see him, never talked with him! How should I know where he went," panted Besly. "I want to help, but don't know how. Only three ways he could go. To Walla Walla and the coast. Or to the Oro Fino diggings, which are about played out. Or down to the Salmon diggings. Now I've talked I might as well stick my head through a noose. Bill Bunton will murder me. The mob will murder me. I'd do better to die in front of your pistol."

"Stop it!" Joyce accompanied the order by a sharp shake. "No one saw me come in here. No one will know what you tell me. But you're holding something back, you rat, and you know it. You've mentioned three general directions. Now talk!" This was a guess, a bluff on Joyce's part.

"May God strike me dead if I know where the younker went to. I don't know a blessed thing about it except what I've told you. But the night before Bunton came to me I heard Jack Cleveland say something about something twenty-five miles from Lewiston, something between Pataha and Alpwai Creeks. I did hear that, but it don't mean nothing. Now you can cut my throat, but I can't tell you any more."

"I think you are telling the truth. The mob outside isn't after you. It's celebrating a war victory. You're safe now, just now. But take my advice and vamoose. If Bunton talks again with you he'll know in a second you've talked."

His errand finished he passed out the rear door and crossed to the next street and hurried to the other end of the town. When he halted he was at the rear of the Cathrood place. He spied on the cook room and, as he had hoped, discovered Captain Battle alone, taking advantage of the afternoon lull to smoke his pipe and read a newspaper. He attracted the old man's attention and motioned for him to come outside.

The captain was quick to sense that something of importance was stirring. He emerged and eagerly asked—

"Any good news about the boy?"

"I wouldn't be back here if there was. I'd be talking to Miss Lavinia. I want you to comb your brain and see if you can find anything that has to do with the Walla Walla road, twenty-five miles from here, between Pataha and Alpwai Creeks."

"I vum! That's a queer one," mumbled the captain.

"You must heard some of your customers mention conditions down there," prompted Joyce.

The old man combed his fingers through his beard and replied:

"Why, it's gitting to be commonly known that hosses ain't safe along 'bout there. That some folks have been halted and robbed along 'bout there. Just as they've been robbed'n' worse over at the foot of Craig's Mountain on the Oro Fino road. But I vow if that ain't all I can think of. The danger spot on the Oro Fino road is where the main road's cut by a pack train trail on the Nez Perces reservation. Heard some of our people jawing because the resident Injun agent won't clean up the premises. I've heard tell how men have started over both roads and never arrived anywhere. Just dropped out. If any places like them had been talked 'bout down in Mexico along the time of the war—"

"Yes, yes. You're not to mention to Miss Lavinia that I've been here and had this talk with you. Remember."

He turned away before the captain could more than gape stupidly and tug at his long beard.

THE PARADE was over and the town was returning to its ordinary bustling confusion. The auctioneers had reappeared to bawl their wares, and the hurdy gurdy fiddles again were sounding their shrill invitations. Joyce hurried to secure his horse and ride down the Walla Walla road on the strength of what Besly had overheard Cleveland tell Bunton, "Something between Pataha and Alpwai Creeks." When opposite Tracy & Company's store he was inspired to enter and have a few words with the proprietor.

Tracy greeted him warmly and said—

"Heard you were back from Florence. Ready to ride pony express down there for me?"

"Not yet. I want some information. What is there, twenty-five miles from here, between Pataha and Alpwai Creeks?"

Tracy stared blankly for a moment; then his shrewd eyes lighted.

"There's scenery for one thing," he said.

"I'll put it more intelligently. Have you ever heard of horsethieves having a hiding place down there?"

"I've heard that stolen horses have been taken down that way, also out on the Oro Fino road," whispered Tracy, glancing about to guard against being overheard. "How are you concerned?"

"It's so vague in my mind you may think me crazy when I try to explain. But here goes. I'm starting to hunt for young Cathrood, who's disappeared."

"You fear he's thrown in with thieves?"

"God forbid! But he's vanished. Left no word for his sister. I fear foul play. If alive I believe he's being held somewhere for some game I can't figure out."

"Joyce, I don't dare tell even you what I've found myself believing. It concerns men, especially one man in this town, that would make you think I'm the crazy one. No proof. Just a suspicion I can't keep out of my mind. Lawless men are flocking here at a terrible rate. Some magnet is drawing them. There is an understanding among them. There is some one, Joyce, who is giving them orders. And I don't dare name the man I suspect as I haven't a shred of proof. Soon we must pattern after California and organize a vigilance committee. I trust you. When I can find a dozen more of the same caliber I'll forget profits and come out in the open. Now, back to the boy. If he didn't go away from choice then there must be some purpose behind his disappearance. You ask about Pataha Creek. I'm not the only one who believes there is a shebang down there, as well as on the Orno Fino road, where the curious aren't welcome, and where pilgrims with dust step off the earth. If you ride alone you'll never come back."

Joyce astounded him by drawing a gun and plunging for the door and the street. In five minutes he returned and tersely explained, "One of two men, who trailed me from Florence and twice tried to pot me, was watching us through the window. Tall, thin man in buckskin. Totes a rifle. Now I can't go for my horse. I must wait till dark before pulling out. I want one of your horses."

"A good one will be saddled and ready in the lean-to back of the store. But don't ride alone. I'll go with you to hunt the tall man in buckskin."

"No. I've searched the town for them. They keep snug much of the time. Much obliged for the horse. If I'm rubbed out between now and sundown send, or lead, a posse down to the shebang beyond Pataha Creek."

On returning to the street he renewed his search for the two hunters. His wanderings brought him near the Cathrood place. Bummer came running up to him, exclaiming:

"The missus wants to see you mighty bad. Cap'n Battle's out looking for you."

Joyce found the girl standing outside the restaurant. Some terrible emotion was reflected in her wild gaze and tightly compressed lips. She gave a little cry on beholding him and retreated inside the house. He was quick to follow her and ask—

"What's happened, Lavinia?"

She swept her gaze around the room, where three men were eating.

"They're safe. All honest men," she whispered. "Read what I place on the table, but don't pick it up."

She left the table to learn if her patrons cared for more food, and he advanced and looked down on a sheet of paper covered with scrawling writing. He read:

> Five thousand dollars in dust, to be paid as later directed, for the safe return of your brother. You have three days in which to raise the money. You will be watched very closely. If you tell any one about this demand we shall know, and you will know you have killed your brother.

Joyce lighted a cigar and glanced toward the girl. She returned and rested hands on the table and secured the paper and crumpled it in a wad.

"Who brought this, and when?" he murmured.

"I found it on the table right after a

customer went out. I don't even know that he left it, or how long it had been there. I just found it."

"What kind of a looking man?"

"Tall. Wore buckskin. That's how I remember him."

Joyce bit through his cigar and muttered:

"He's the one. He left it. Probably he wrote it. But he never composed it. The English is too good to go with such slovenly writing. The man who wrote it, copied it. I'm going on a still hunt. Planned before I knew this. Here's what you must do. Stop looking so tragic. I'll arrange with Tracy & Company to have five thousand in dust ready for you. At the end of three days if any one calls for the money, pay it."

"You're good to me, Stephen," she tremulously murmured. "But I can raise five thousand easy enough. But oh, Stephen! Will they let him come back after getting the money?"

He mopped the nervous perspiration from his brow and encouraged:

"Of course. But if I can have a streak of luck I'll fetch him back. Don't torture yourself with bad thoughts. Just think everything will come out all right."

Already his coming had helped her some. Her keen mind was alert against spies and spying. She told him:

"You must sit down and eat. If any one saw you enter, and spies, he'll find you came in to eat."

He nodded approvingly and took a place at a table, facing the entrance, and was served by Bummer. Inside of a few minutes a shaggy, ragged man, seemingly under the influence of liquor, staggered in. The man's eyes were sharp and searching and for a moment his gaze rested on Joyce, who was busily eating. Before the girl could speak the man was mumbling:

" 'Scuse me, ma'am. Thought this was a bar. Wanta drink."

And he staggered out on the street.

When Joyce paid for his meal he lifted his brows and murmured, "Spy," and immediately took his departure. He called into several stores and briefly talked trade with different merchants, and at last entered the Tracy store. Securing the proprietor's attention he began talking prices and led the way to a long table heaped with clothing. Tracy took his cue and dickered a trifle before consenting to give an order. Joyce wrote on a pad of paper as though taking down the various items, and from the corner of his eye surveyed several customers. None looked suspicious. Finishing writing, Joyce announced, "If you'll look that over, Mr. Tracy, and O. K. it, I'll see how soon I can get the stuff here."

Tracy read the brief account of the kidnappers' demand, and added his signature with a flourish. As he walked to the door with Joyce he murmured—

"Still plan to ride?"

Joyce bowed his head. Back in the street he soon came to a halt and endeavored to plan the best way of putting in his time until evening. While he was cogitating a bullet whined close to his ear and punctured a window behind him. He dived into a group of men for shelter and examined the resorts across the street. Keeping behind two men he crossed and entered a barroom directly opposite his position when he was fired on. The place was filled and the noise was almost deafening. Once he failed to behold either of the hunters he knew it was useless to look for the would-be assassin. Any man jostling by him might be the man. The explosion of a revolver was too common to attract attention. He remained in the place until he happened to see Plummer passing. Hurrying out he walked along with him and said:

"Henry, I just missed death by a hair. Some darn fool sent a bullet so close to my head it almost creased me."

"It's outrageous that men can't get drunk without firing off guns," wrathfully declared Plummer. "If you'd seen the fool you would have been doing right to have shot him in his tracks. I believe we ought to have a town law against any one toting weapons. I'll be glad to give up my gun. Come along to the Miner's Rest and see if you're as lucky at faro as you are in dodging lead."

"Later. Now I must attend to some business."

"No word from the Cathrood boy?"

"Not a word. I ate supper at their place. Miss Cathrood is much worried. More upset than I would have expected. That is, she seems more upset now than she did when she first talked with me about it."

They parted and Joyce entered upon the tedious task of walking the streets and always keeping with groups of men. But the streets were no longer safe once dusk came and the cloth walls became translucent. Now he was fearing lest a murderer should find him and knife him in the jostling throng. He had intended to wait until later in the evening, but the fear that every man at his back was a killer drove him to the rear of the store. A figure came to an erect position in front of him. His gun was half drawn when Tracy's voice murmured:

"Easy. Been standing watch to make sure no one stole the critter. I still think you are foolish to ride alone."

"If I can keep from being killed until clear of this town I'll be lucky. Some one tried to kill me on the street. Bullet all but caught me."

Tracy remained on guard while Joyce entered the lean-to. With a final handclasp and a whispered good-by, Joyce swung into the saddle and rode at reckless speed for the Walla Walla road.

CHAPTER V

THE SHOWDOWN

SEVERAL times during the night Joyce believed he heard a horse far behind him. The sound was faint and no horseman overtook him. Early morning found him crossing the Pataha. Now he traveled more cautiously, as he believed he was within a few miles of the outlaws' rendezvous. He halted in a small opening and surveyed the narrow slot cut by the road through the gloomy pines ahead. He decided it would be wise to proceed afoot; and he swung from the saddle and felt his hat jump convulsively. Reacting instantly, he fell to the ground, his left hand still clutching the reins. There he remained, sprawled on his back, his eyes searching the back trail.

The boom of the gun and the fall of his rider caused the horse to take fright. Joyce spoke softly and succeeded in quieting his mount. Remaining supine, he risked the danger of a second shot from the growth in preference to bolting with the unseen in pursuit. From the detonation he knew his invisible foe was using a rifle.

He was disappointed because no horse approached. He began to fear the assassin was circling through the growth to one side of his position. Then his fingers closed over the handle of a gun as through his half closed eyes he beheld a figure about to emerge from the growth. A few more seconds and he was beholding one of the tall hunters. It was Ben. He was afoot and his horse was not in sight.

The hunter grinned wolfishly as he stared at the prostrate figure. He cradled his rifle and advanced with long, businesslike strides. He must have discerned a slight movement of the sprawling figure or detected life in the staring eyes, for of a sudden he made a deep gutteral sound and started to throw up his rifle.

Without shifting his position or releasing his grip on the reins, Joyce fired twice, rapidly, aiming at the heart. The hunter came to a halt and jerked upright as if surprised. Then his knees buckled and he went down. The horse tried to bolt, and for a few moments Joyce believed he must let the animal run to escape being trampled upon. He spoke gently and managed to get on his feet, and then led the horse to a tree and tied him. Momentarily he expected the arrival of Buck on the scene, but he could not leave the dead man in the road to advertise an enemy had passed that way. Nor could he call his disagreeable task finished until he had removed the body some distance into the growth and had heaped brush and deadwood over it.

He hid the rifle under a fallen tree at the edge of the timber. Mounting, he rode back over the trail to pick up the hunter's horse. His proposed elimination of the horse was a more gruesome tragedy than was the killing of the owner. After pressing his quest for a mile he decided the animal had started back for Lewiston. He had no time to waste in further pursuit, although he knew the appearance of the riderless animal in town would be the signal for the dead man's friends to institute an investigation. He turned about and reentered the clearing and again dismounted.

He hoped the shebang was too far away for the sound of the shots to be heard, but he followed his original plan of proceeding afoot so long as the road was snugly hemmed in by the woods. And as he walked along he scrutinized both sides of the road for signs of a horse trail leading from it. He found one, on the right, and started to enter it. Then reason told him there should be another, to convenience those riding up from Walla Walla. He hurried on and a quarter of a mile from the first trail he came upon a second. Figuring that the two trails would unite at, or near, the rendezvous he led his horse into the growth at the left of the trail and advanced for half a mile before he found an opening where the animal could graze. Staking him out, he examined his guns and took time to reload the the two empty chambers.

The triangle, formed by the main road and the two trails, was dangerous ground, and he proposed to keep outside of it. He entered the growth and endeavored to hold a due east course. Here the ancient trees were spaced farther apart and with but little ground litter. His first intimation of being near a habitation was the aroma of smoke. He scouted warily and saw the early sunlight streaming into the cover. He "froze" behind a tree on hearing a shrill voice explain:

"I'm damn' tired of waiting. Too much waiting in this business."

Some one laughed and bantered:

"Only three more days, Tilter. You're time ain't so precious you'll be pulling out before the pot is opened."

"After this is finished another job'll keep us penned up out in nowhere for some more time. You can grin, Nap, but I've been on shebang duty ten times as much as you have."

"Oh, shut up! Tell it to the chief. Or I'll mention it to him when I git to town."

"No, no, Nap! Not even in foolin' don't talk like that. I was just blowin' off some of my lonesome, tired feelin'." Then raising his voice he bawled, "When do we eat, Buck?"

From a bit of a distance a deep voice boomed back, "I was waitin' to see if Ben wouldn't pull in. But we'll eat without waitin' when the meat's done."

Joyce's nerves tingled. Whether young Cathrood was there, or not, he had uncovered a rare nest of villains. He cautiously stole forward until he could glimpse the scene. Near the edge of the woods, and within fifty feet of his position, was the shebang. It was a long squat log house large enough to accommodate quite a number of men. The opening was roughly circular and half a mile across. Beyond the house was a corral large enough to accommodate many horses. It was empty. Four horses were grazing in the open. All this in one sweeping glance, and then Joyce was studying the men.

Tilter, easily identified by his shrill voice, was whittling a stick of pine with a bowie-knife. He now spoke, saying:

"Who knows when we'll all make a shift? I'm gittin' tired of the place. Too damn' dull. I want to hear some fiddle music an' drink at a bar 'stead of out of a jug. I'll heave knives with you, Nap, for a dollar a throw."

A short, square chunk of a man came to his feet and called to a third:

"Come in on this, Rasen. We'll empty his poke so he'll be busted when he does git to town and his fiddle music."

Rasen, as dark as an Indian, rose and drew his knife without saying a word.

For some reason Joyce picked him out as being the most dangerous of the trio. Tilter ran to a tree and pinned up a playing card for a target. The scarified bark indicated it often had been used for a similar purpose. Then Joyce stiffened and believed he was to get his big chance of learning if he was on a fool's errand or had run the game to ground. For from the house came Buck, walking with the lope of a woodsman and carrying a big knife. He tersely announced:

"I'm in on this while the meat's frying. Just about time to take in three dollars from each of you."

Tilter threw first and struck his blade in a corner of the card. Nap's steel landed a bit wider. Tilter crowed like a rooster and flapped his arms against his sides. Joyce saw no more as he was hastening along the edge of the growth to get beyond the house. He heard Tilter's shrill voice complaining and the raucous laughter of the others.

He came to the back of the house and passed on. Once at the end he must risk leaving cover for one glance through a window. He was startled and sadly disappointed to hear the explosion of a gun inside the log walls. The talk among the men had led him to believe there were but four of them and that only a prisoner could be in the house. He dropped on the ground and wriggled back a bit. Yells and execrations made him think he had been discovered by the knife throwers as well as by the man indoors. He was puzzled to hear two more shots without hearing the whistle of lead.

Enlightenment came when one of the men cried:

"Don't shoot back, you fools! He's busted loose'n' got a gun! Take cover! This must be talked over."

"I'll kill the first man who tries to get in here!" shouted young Cathrood's voice.

Joyce advanced on his hands and knees. He heard Buck, the hunter, complain:

"This is a pretty howdy-do! The chief won't like this a bit."

"But you was in there last, Buck. You're oughter seen he was snugly tied up," whined Tilter.

"I'll cut your weazen if you find fault with me," roared the hunter. "I'm the cook. It was your stretch for keepin' an eye on the kid."

"All of you keep shut," harshly commanded Rasen. "Hi, kid! Quit that foolishness. Your friends have chipped a pot to buy back. Money'll be paid any minute now. We're waitin' for one of the boys to fetch it in. You be good and put down that gun and in a hour you'll be riding back to Lewiston."

As he talked he slowly walked toward the house.

"You're lying to me. Halt. I'll shoot."

"No I ain't lying to you. Why should we bother to fetch you here if it wasn't to make a little side-money? You're no good to us dead. Drop your gun'n' we won't even tie you. We'll treat you just like one of the fambly."

A bullet kicked up the dirt at his feet and another clipped by his head. In a furious passion Rasen fired two shots through the window. The boy promptly emptied a gun and the men, including Rasen, ran for cover, cursing and raving. By this time Joyce was through the window unseen by the outlaws. Unseen by Cathrood, too, until his feet struck the hard dirt floor. Then the youth spun about and fired, the lead going wide by a foot. Then he dazedly cried:

"Joyce!"

"You do as I say mighty quick if you want to save your pelt," softly said Joyce. "Out of this end window and into the woods. They can't see you. Travel due west. You'll find my nag staked in a little opening. Ride to Walla Walla and stay there." He seized the astounded youth by the shoulder and fairly hurled him toward the open window, a square hole.

"Be quick before they get into the woods and cut you off!"

"But, Steve, what about you?" mumbled Cathrood.

"I'm O. K. Got a big posse coming. Quick! Be off!"

He pushed him over the sill and forced him to drop to the ground. Then he ran to the other end of the room and waved a handkerchief at the opening. This maneuver was to keep the men from advancing through the woods and, unwittingly, blocking Cathrood's flight.

FROM behind the tree on which was fastened a playing card Buck cried—

"Does that mean you've come to your senses, you young fool?"

"Is it true about my going free?" countered Joyce, trying to imitate the nervous voice of the youth.

"Why, Lawd bless your heart's gizzard!" heartily roared the hunter. "We wouldn't hurt a hair of your head for nothin'! Now be good, and let us come in before the meat burns. We won't tie you up no more. You're goin' home right smart."

"You wait a minute and let me think it over," Joyce answered. He stepped to the fireplace, set the skillet of meat aside and hungrily began eating. He heard Rasen say—

"Something's happened to the younker's voice. Sounds gruffer."

"What'n sin do we care about his voice?" cried Nap. "I want to know if he's put down that damn' gun."

Joyce now believed young Cathrood was as good as free if he had traveled in the right direction. As none of the four men as yet attempted to circle the house Joyce took time to look about him. Besides the window at each end of the house there was one at the back, giving on the woods and opposite the door. None of these had sash and glass. These openings afforded any besiegers an excellent chance to pour in a vicious crossfire. A miscellany of provisions were stacked in one corner. A quantity of new blankets, several jugs presumably containing liquor, nearly a dozen revolvers, a rifle, and saddle with dark stains were scattered along the room. The saddle, and several articles of clothing hung on pegs recalled to Joyce the town talk about men starting for the coast but never arriving.

"Poor devils just stepped off the map," muttered Joyce.

Then Rasen's fierce voice was bellowing:

"Inside there, kid. Is it all right for us to come in? Got over your fool tantrum?"

"Not yet. I must have time to think."

Rasen swore viciously and told Tilter—

"You go in there'n' take his guns."

"An' git potted? An' him having the pick of a armful of guns? Not on your life."

"You'll git potted if you don't," warned Rasen. "If you'd been in there watching of him this wouldn't happened."

"He can't hit a barn," encouraged Buck. "Just run zigzag."

"No, no! I don't want to. See here; you fellers ain't fair," protested Tilter.

"Git along!" thundered Rasen.

Whimpering more complaints, Tilter showed himself and commenced a slow advance on the house. Every few steps he would pause and glanced behind him. Joyce picked up the rifle, a Henry, and found it was loaded. He stood back and at one side of the window waited for some of the concealed trio to show themselves. Tilter halted and cried:

"They're making me do this, kid. You understand."

Rasen, impatient, thrust his arm from behind a tree shook, his fist menacingly and yelled—

"Stir your boots, you scum!"

The rifle cracked and with a hoarse scream Rasen reeled into full view and began firing his revolver. A second bullet caught him through the head. This unexpected tragedy astounded the three men for a moment. Tilter, in the open, was the first to react. Shrieking like a mad man, he emptied his gun at the window, then turned and raced for cover. Joyce picked him with a bullet through the back.

Buck cried out, "Young devil's got my old Betsy, Nap! We just got to kill him."

"Oughter killed him out of hand," raged Nap. "No sense to keep him alive when it was understood he never was to be turned loose to tell things."

"By God! I'd give a year of my life to have that old rifle in my paws," passionately vowed Buck.

Joyce knew there would be no more frontal attacks. He made for the window, through which he had entered, and dropped lightly to the ground. He carried the rifle with him. He believed he was unseen as he gained the growth; at least no shots were fired at him. Now it was a test of woodcraft, with two against one, with Buck alone making the odds overwhelmingly uneven. However, he had no desire to essay flight. Nap's betrayal of the kidnappers' plan to murder the youth regardless of ransom money being paid, or refused, filled him with a new and terrible rage. Falling back a short distance, he halted behind a big pine and hoped that one of the men, at least, would approach within range.

For some minutes he heard only the hum of insects and the murmurous whispering of the wind in the pine tops. A staccato *bang bang* shattered the silence. Futilely firing lead at a log house was not the way to "Injun" the man who knew the house was empty. More shots were fired to mask further a hidden approach through the growth. With his nerves tightening Joyce glared suspiciously to his right.

He knew, as positively as if seeing the man with the revolver, that it was Nap who was making the demonstration. He knew that Buck would never delegate a stealthy attack to any in the band. The fusilade also convinced him Buck suspected nothing of what had happened. And that he still believed the youth was in the cabin. Again a revolver was emptied, and Nap began talking in a loud voice. Remaining motionless, Joyce waited. His range of vision was shortened by the timber, but he did not believe it to be humanly possible for even the tall hunter to get between him and the house without being promptly discovered.

He stared convulsively as he heard a faint sound between him and the cabin. His respect for Buck's woods cunning vastly increased. The impossible had silently become possible. Buck had arrived and even then was working to gain the rear window. Joyce cautiously peered around the bole and fancied he caught the suggestion of motion, although it was so brief and shadowy he could not be positive. His original plan was to follow whoever came and to shoot him as he was in the act of peering through the window. But he was nonplused by the man's stealth. He did not believe he could advance and sight him without being detected.

"Must shift my play," he told himself, and with all the caution he possessed he started toward Nap's position.

He could hear Nap talking and interspersing his profane threats with occasional shots. He also called on Buck to try his skill, as if that individual were close by. Joyce believed he had been euchered out of any advantage he had held, and that once Buck reached the window he would know his game was in the timber and come questing like a bloodhound. Realizing it was imperative he should take the initiative before the ruse was discovered, Joyce advanced. He had but small fear of Nap discovering him, as the latter was drowning his own ears with gunfire and profanity.

When abreast of the man's position Joyce turned toward it. A few rods, and he was catching brief glimpses of the outlaw. He reached a tree within twenty feet of his man before his presence was discovered. Even then Nap suspected no danger. In a low voice he querulously complained:

"What's your notion? Why did you come back? Git him with a knife?"

Then his amazed gaze beheld the bowed, buckskin clad figure of the hunter dart from the growth and make for a cabin window.

With an animal snarl he treed himself and challenged:

"Who is it?" You, kid?"

"It's Death," somberly answered Joyce.

Nap sounded a whining howl and

began firing without seeing anything to shoot at. From the cabin came a roar of rage; then the tall hunter was bawling:

"He's gone! Scut's lit out! Took my old Betsy with him! Into the woods after him!"

"Come here!" screamed Nap. "Some one's here!"

As he shouted he half faced about toward the cabin. Joyce fired at an exposed arm. The smashing impact of the heavy bullet caused Nap to stagger back a step, and a second bullet crashed through his side, killing him on his feet.

Running forward, Joyce saw Buck standing irresolute. He was puzzled by the shots and his companion's wild outcry. He had not witnessed the outcome of the tree duel. Believing the safest move was to keep the fighting in the open, Joyce walked along the edge of the timber, but in full view. The hunter beheld him approaching, his face stupid with incredulity and amazement. He stood with a gun in each hand, gaping.

He came to his senses and shouted:

"Nap, git that feller! Shoot, you fool!"

He lifted a heavy gun and fired twice.

Joyce pressed forward, thankful the hunter was not armed with his rifle. Weaving from side to side he spoke, announcing:

"Your friend is dead. Just the two of us now."

Buck fired again and paused to demand hoarsely—

"What you hornin' in for?"

"I've come to collect pay for the shots you and Ben fired at me at the White Bird crossing. I've settled with Ben—"

With a ferocious roar Buck leaped forward and charged down on him, firing alternately with both hands. Joyce halted and fired twice. The double report scarcely sounded before Buck was slowly kneeling, the guns slipping from his hands; then he was pitching violently forward.

Joyce, suddenly faint now the fight was ended, fanned himself with his hat and panted heavily as if spent by long running. It seemed incredible that his hunting had been so quickly and successfully terminated. He had done what had seemed impossible. The youngster was safe. His next reaction was a fierce hatred for all the evil the cabin stood for. His first thought was to burn it. But as he stared at the dead man and began picturing the gang's dismay when it learned the truth, he was inclined to play a more gruesome jest, to have the impact of the discovery come as a blow, and not forecast by black smoke crawling high in the heavens.

He dragged the hunter into the cabin and propped him in a sitting posture against the wall. To complete the ghastly tableau he made three trips and added the other outlaws to the picture. He had finished and was standing back by the door to get the effect on the first comer crossing the threshold when he caught the sound of galloping hoofs. He leaped inside and to the end window and received the surprise of his life. Young Cathrood was riding into the opening from the northern trail.

JOYCE vaulted through the window. The youth gave a cry of dismay and reined to a halt, his eyes rapidly searching for an egress from the opening. Joyce called his name twice before the boy could collect his senses sufficient to recognize him. With an incredulous yelp of joy he raced to the house, one hand pressed over his pounding heart. He tumbled from the saddle and excitedly babbled:

"I didn't go down country. Couldn't run away and leave Sis. Started up the Lewiston road. Saw two men coming toward me. They howled at me and rode toward me very fast. I wheeled and turned into a side road. Never so took back in my life when I found where that road had fetched me!"

"Good Lord! Inside and keep out of sight!" groaned Joyce.

As Cathrood obeyed Joyce took the horse and the four animals belonging to the outlaws back of the cabin and hitched them inside the timber. Returning to the cabin he entered through the end window and found young Cathrood weakly leaning against the wall, his face distorted with horror. Joyce had forgotten about the dead men. He seized the youth's arm and shook him, and explained:

"We fought. I out-Injuned them. Who were the men you saw?"

"I couldn't tell," panted Cathrood. "One looked like an Injun."

"Did they see you take the road in here?"

"I don't think so."

"Watch from the window without showing yourself while I'm reloading my own guns."

"But there's lots of guns all loaded, Steve."

"Never mind. Didn't you hear the sound of firing while I was fighting those men?"

"Oh, the woods, the whole world, seemed to be filled with gun firing," sighed Cathrood. "I got all mixed up as to direction until I rode into the Lewiston road. I must have been fair crazy. Just sense enough to know I wouldn't run and leave Lavinia behind. But, Steve! How did you do it? The four of them!"

"It was a job that had to be done. I kept out of sight and whittled them down," somberly explained Joyce. "I fought it out with the tall man in the open. Now tell me how they bagged you in the first place."

"I was coming from the Miner's Rest after losing my pile. Something hit me on the head. That's all. When I woke up I was in this horrible place and tied up like a bundle of old clothes. I groaned and Buck gave me some water, but wouldn't leave me untied. Before I let them know I had come to I heard talk. I learned how they would ask Lavinia to dig up some dust to get me back. And I heard enough more to know they would never let me go even after she had paid the price. When Buck ran out to heave knives I rolled to the fireplace and burned the cords off my wrists. If there's a hell on earth I've been through it!"

"So has Lavinia. Gambling hasn't panned out top high in your case, has it?"

"Oh, if we all can get out of this alive, Steve, I'll always hate the sight of card games!" groaned Cathrood.

"Gene, you ought to quit. You're your own boss. It's up to you. Those four dead men paid their worthless lives to cure you of gambling. Your sister has paid in worrying and suffering. But you're your own boss. You can keep on—"

"Doggone! I say I've quit. Don't I know you paid by risking your life against terrible odds?"

Joyce's tanned face grew warm.

"Oh, that's nothing. I had a grudge against two of the outfit. The two hunters. I got one back in the woods a piece; t'other one here. There! I've reloaded. Always feel better with my own guns."

"Some one's coming," excitedly whispered Cathrood. "And your horse has busted free. Two men. One of them is pointing at your horse."

"It belongs to a Lewiston man. They can't identify him as being mine," said Joyce. "Show yourself at the window for a few seconds."

Before Cathrood could move one of the newcomers was shouting—

"Inside the house there!"

Cathrood stepped to the window. Both riders advanced and dismounted near the cabin. One of them demanded—

"Why did you run from us, you young fool?"

"I was scared," Cathrood honestly replied.

With a grunt and an oath the two came through the doorway. Immediately on their right, and flattened against the wall stood Joyce. They did not see him. Their horrified gaze was focused on the grim company seated with backs to the walls. Jack Cleveland was the first to find his voice. He began—

"In the name of God—"

"Name of the devil!" harshly corrected Joyce, and he stepped close and shoved a muzzle of a .45 against each. The second man was Bill Bunton, still painted like an Indian.

The two were too dazed to think of resistance. After Cathrood had disarmed them Bunton huskily asked—

"Who done for 'em?"

"I did," said Joyce. "Now why are you two rascals chasing my young friend?"

Cleveland's wits cleared enough for him to take the defensive. He loudly insisted:

"To take him back to his sorrerin' sister. The young fool wouldn't stop when we yelled to him."

Joyce stared at the couple moodily. Finally he said:

"Cleveland, I ought to kill you. You belong to this outfit. So does Bunton. I'm sorry you weren't in the cabin with those four men when I blew in."

"I don't know a blessed thing you're saying," protested Cleveland. "Bill'n' me was riding down to Walla Walla when we see Cathrood. We knew he was missing. We knew his sister was worried. We hooted to him 'n' he turned like a crazy thing'n' bolted'n' come in here. I knew them boys, yes." He glanced aside at the silent four. "But I didn't know all they was up to. You can't murder me in cold blood."

"No, I know it, worse luck. You'll ride ahead of us to Lewiston. When you get there you'll pay a hundred dollars into Tracy's store to my account. You lost your bet. Besly did take back his words. He's vanished by this time and out of your reach. It was something you said to Bunton here that gave me my clue. I believe I shall be sorry for letting you and Bunton leave this place. But you two aren't out of the woods yet. Inside of twelve hours after reaching Lewiston you two will leave that town for the last time. If you act smart you can leave on horseback. If you delay you'll take the longest journey man ever took, by the rope trail. Oh, by the way, I killed Ben up the road a piece."

Cleveland, an abject coward when not possessing all the advantage, would not have made an offensive move even had he been armed and given a bit of leeway. He was thoroughly cowed. His jaw sagged as he stared at the slayer of five as prime villians as ever infested the gold camps.

"I'll ride'n' be glad to. Much obliged, Joyce."

AT THE edge of the town Joyce turned the horses of the dead desperadoes into a corral, and then told Cleveland and Bunton:

"Remember the twelve hours. Don't be here after that time. Don't forget the hundred you're to pay to my account at Tracy's, Cleveland."

"I'll pay it to you now, right here," hoarsely offered Cleveland.

"No. I'll have no direct dealings with you."

The two desperadoes rode on while Joyce and Cathrood made for the restaurant. As they were dismounting a short distance from the place young Cathrood softly exclaimed—

"There's Lavinia talking with some one!"

As the man turned his profile Cathrood added:

"It's Henry Plummer. He'll be glad to see me back."

Placing a hand on the young man's shoulder, Joyce said:

"Son, don't go to throwing yourself on Plummer's bosom. Don't ask any questions now. But don't gush."

"I don't understand, Steve. He's been good to me," said Cathrood.

"Erhuh. You see, I don't like him as well as I did. He'll be leaving town soon. You'll be going down to the coast. You and Plummer won't meet again."

Lavinia Cathrood now discovered them. For a few moments she stared as if doubting her eyesight. Then with a shrill cry of joy she was running forward to throw her arms around her brother's neck. Plummer stared at the tableau blankly for a bit, made as if to turn away, and then slowly advanced. He heard the youth loudly explaining:

"Steve did it all, Lavinia. Only think! He killed five men to get me out of a fix. They planned to kill me after the money had been paid over. He fought it out with the five of them and killed them all!"

"Here, here! Stop that chatter," broke in Joyce.

Plummer now obtruded on the scene, enthusiastically exclaiming:

"So you've fetched the boy back, Stephen. I was just about to ride in search of him."

"Steve, you did all that to help us!" breathlessly cried Lavinia.

He patted her shoulder and said to Plummer:

"I'm glad it isn't necessary for you to take up the hunt. Had you started when I did, and had you known where to search, you might have got there first."

Plummer's lips tightened. He answered:

"I couldn't believe but what Gene would be back. I waited and called here ten minutes ago to see if he had returned."

"He wanted to be sure of his pay," broke in Lavinia. "From his talk I took it his going for Eugene depended on my marrying him."

"Oh, Miss Lavinia!" softly expostulated Plummer. "Not that way at all! I would have gone after your brother anyway. Steve, did I hear our young friend say something about a killing?"

"Lavinia, take Gene inside and feed him. Plummer, let's walk and talk a bit."

As he spoke he took Plummer's arm and led him away. The girl knew her presence was not wanted and insisted on her brother going with her inside the restaurant. Surrounded by bustling life, and yet isolated, Joyce said:

"You heard right. Five of your friends have cashed in. Ben, Buck, Nap, Tilter, and Rasen. After they were out of the game Cleveland and Bunton came along. I know I made a mistake in not rubbing them out. I've given them twelve hours start of a posse."

Plummer's eyes were lurid. He moistened his lips and said:

"I can't believe Cleveland has been up to anything real bad. Do you mean Gene was held a prisoner by force?"

"You know it. Why fool around? Cleveland came here with you. Makes it bad for your reputation. We'll be forming a vigilance committee very soon."

"To hell with what you think about my reputation!" savagely cried Plummer, drawing back a pace.

"I'd just as soon make it an even half dozen men," warned Joyce as he dropped a hand on his gun.

They stared into each other's eyes in silence for nearly half a minute. Then Plummer folded his arms, gave a short laugh, and said:

"You must be crazy! You can't run that bluff on me or on this town. It's mighty queer that you should know just where to look for the brat."

With a crash Joyce's fist came up under his chin and knocked him down.

"Now get up and listen to my talk," muttered Joyce.

Plummer came to his feet, glaring murder, but dared not draw a gun. Witnesses of the blow drew back hurriedly, yet lingered near and risked flying bullets in order to see the end of the affair. It seemed incredible that Plummer would not take toll for the blow, or die in the trying. Plummer breathed hard and muttered—

"Let's get out of this."

"I'm not keeping you but a minute. Be out of town before sunset. I'm doing wrong in turning you loose on some other town, but I'm no officer of the law. You planned for the boy to be stolen, for the demand to be left for a ransom. The six dead men were only your hired hands. I'm starting a posse for the shebang on the Oro Fino road. You'll doubtless travel south. When you overtake Cleveland and Bunton they'll probably tell you how they buried five men down beyond Pataha Creek while I held the guns. You've run your game out in Lewiston."

Plummer opened his mouth to speak.

but either was inarticulate with rage, or was unable to make any defense. Without a word he turned and hurried from the gaping spectators. Joyce watched him narrowly until he disappeared down the street; then he hastened to join the girl at the entrance of her eating house. He abruptly began:

"Gene probably has told you the good news. That he's decided he's not cut out for a gambler. I've decided this is no place for you. So, you'll sell out and go back to civilization. We'll travel together as far as Portland, at least. After we're married—"

"Married?" she gasped.

"Of course. That's the good news. Why did I come up here except to find you? After we're married I'll go South. Once in Portland, when I was cheering over a Southern victory, you remarked, 'But you're not in the fighting.' It's been like a burr in my mind ever since. So you'll either be the widow of a war hero or the wife of a second Captain Battle. I'm going to talk with Tracy. He'll buy you out or find a cash customer. I'm giving ourselves six hours to get started for the trip. So we must all work sharp!"

"Well, good land, Steve Joyce! Maybe you think you can sweep me off my feet—"

"Of course. You don't weigh more'n a hundred and ten pounds."

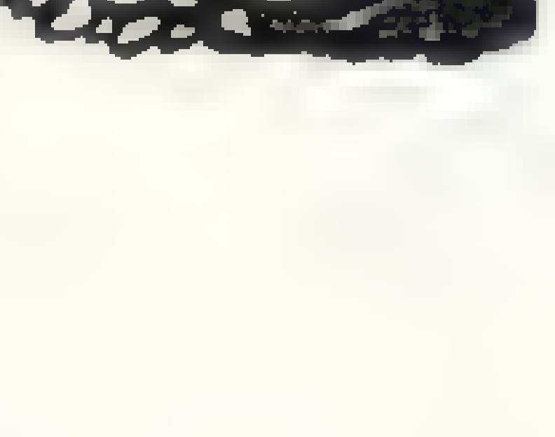
Before either could speak further young Cathrood threw himself between them, eagerly crying:

"Steve, there's no man on earth I'd rather have for a brother-in-law. Why, Lavinia, he stuck to it until he'd rubbed out six—"

"Hold your tongue, Gene! Lavinia, will you sell and start for the coast as soon as I've found a buyer? Or is it my civic duty to follow after Cleveland and Bunton and Plummer and see they—"

"No, no! Yes!" And nodding her head she blindly groped her way inside the tent and collided with Captain Battle. She threw her arms around the astounded veteran's neck and sobbed:

"A man says I must marry him! And, oh, Cap'n, I'm very happy!"



The Camp-Fire

A free-to-all Meeting-Place *for* Readers, Writers *and* Adventurers

Harold Bradley Say

"ADMIRALTY ORDERS" in this number, is Mr. Say's first story in *Adventure.* His letter of self introduction comes from the steamship *Eastern Knight* southward bound.

Briefly, I was born in Santa Paula, California, thirty-two years ago, on October 26th. Lived in this little place among the oil fields and lemon trees until my people moved to the Willamette valley in Oregon in 1906. Went to school in a one-roomer—term four months a year then, and on the order of the school Chic Sale had in his vaudeville act. High school in the little Quaker town of Newberg, Oregon. Passed a teacher's examination back in 1914 with the idea of earning money on which to attend university. However, a loan of $250 to me saved the youth of Oregon from this catastrophe. Attended the University of Oregon in 1915 on until I joined the army. Worked on a newspaper part time. Went away with an artillery outfit, did about a year overseas, and until recently have been connected with Portland, Oregon, newspapers, mainly in the capacity of marine editor, as I have a love for things maritime. And now bound from New York to spend a short time in Panama and Costa Rica. My short stories have all been of the sea or late war.—HAROLD B. SAY.

Baa! Baa!

MORE about the speed of sheep shearing. One of you doubts both the American and the Australian records. By the way, Mr. Robertson has sent us clippings passed on to him by an Australian comrade which authoritatively established that Aussie shearers habitually shear from 200 to 300 sheep a day.

I recently came across a letter in your Camp-Fire, written by an Australian signed "G," who stated that there were sheep herders in his country that sheared from 250 to 275 sheep a day and also mentioned shearers clipping 200,000 per year! Figuring a minimum of 24 working days to the month we have from 6000 to 6600 sheared and for 10 months a total of 60,000 to 66,000 for the year. Which is considerably lower than his statement of 200,000 for the same length of time of "shearing up to." I can hardly believe any part of this boast.

Mr. Frank Robertson in his reply, relating to this country, states, "Many shearers have done better than 259 (why not 260?) in a day." This is a startling number also as taking 12 hours for a working day, at the maximum there would be 21 sheep sheared, an hour, or approximately one in three minutes!

Without doubt an expert could shear one ewe in three minutes and let it go at that but when this rate is to be kept up for 12 hours a day and to continue day after day for ten to twelve months and to be done with hand clipping shears—it can't be done! I saw a great many sheep sheared in Colorado on sheep ranches in 1876 when I was a youngster and traveled over three hundred miles throughout the sheep ranch country visiting the big ranches and the very best expert shearing was done then by "greasers" or Mexicans who traveled from ranch to ranch. These shearers I watched day after day working on Mexican "half-breeds" i. e. Mexican ewes crossed with Spanish Infantado Merinos, the wool being without yolk (oil) so that the shearing would be done as rapidly as with Cotswold. These greasers, at their top rate, which was kept up constantly, would not exceed 100 sheep a day—and that was considered quite extraordinary in those days and I doubt if any man today could beat that record!

They worked so fast that with the rapid motions an occasional bit of the ewe came along with the clip; a tip of the ear, etc. In these days when shearing is done with machine clippers probably the above record has been broken but not to the ridiculous extent that has been claimed by the Australian or even as quoted from the book of fiction by Mr. Robertson. At any rate, I "*hae me doots*"!—ELISHA FLAGG.

Your letter to the editor of *Adventure* was forwarded to me some time ago by Mr. Rud. Owing to an automobile accident I have been unable to answer it until now.

The only reason I can see for you questioning my statement that "many shearers have done better than 259 in a day" is that conditions have changed greatly since you saw sheep sheared in 1876. My statement was in no sense an exaggeration. But first let me answer your query, "why not 260?" Obviously you did not read my story "The Long Striker" which occasioned the controversy between myself and G, a controversy in which the then editor of the magazine, Mr. A. S. Hoffman, took part with a brilliant and forceful editorial. It was fiction, of course. The hero, Owen Davis, was shearing under difficulties. To impress the fact that he was under pressure I used the odd number as his maximum, which was more effective than an even number would be. In replying to G I merely wanted to stress the fact that I had not been guilty of exaggeration.

Longstrikers who can shear more than two hundred sheep a day are now so common that I thought it was common knowledge. In fact I was attacked by G because the figure was too low—for Australians.

Now, Mr. Flagg, it happens that I personally know what I am talking about. I have never sheared sheep, but I worked through three shearing seasons at Ed Reese's corral on Corral Creek in Idaho, one year at jamming wool into the sacks and the other two wrangling sheep to the shearers. Besides that I herded and moved camp for nearly five years. I know plenty of shearers who can knock out their two hundred head day in and day out. Many of them on occasion have reached as high as three hundred. Some years ago I saw an article in the *American Sheep Breeder* (Chicago), telling of a shearer in Arizona who had sheared 365 sheep in one day, establishing a new world's record. So far as I know that record still stands. Unfortunately I have forgotten the name of the shearer, but doubtless it can be obtained by writing either to that magazine or to the secretary of the National Woolgrowers' Association, Salt Lake City.

I note three things in your letter which shows how you could easily be mistaken because times have changed. In one place I find shearers referred to as herders. Probably in 1876 herders did do the shearing. They certainly don't now. You say most of the shearing was done by Mexican shearers. That is not the case today. (Ask the officials of the Sheep-shearers Union.) Permit me to name a few of the shearers I have personally known who are two hundred strikers: Jeff Carter, Al and George Robbins, Elbert Call, Bill Jones, Christensen. Shearing in western America is largely done by Americans.

The third point is still more important. The sheep you say were Mexican and Spanish Merinos. They were notoriously hard to shear on account of the many wrinkles. To say that they can be sheared as easily as Cots is silly. Furthermore, sheep with oil in their fleeces are easier sheared than those without. The hotter the weather the greater the quantity of oil and the easier the animal is sheared.

Now I don't pretend that these present day shearers can get into a pen and shear two hundred head of Merinos or Rambouillets in a day. But give them the average loose wool sheep and they will do it without difficulty. If those sheep happened to be brushed until they are "bare-bellies" they can go away beyond that mark. Neither do they work twelve hours a day. The working day is supposed to be ten hours, but more often it is eight or nine because many times the wool is drenched with dew and the shearing doesn't start until they are dried off.

A great many things can happen in fifty years. Can you name a single industry in which labor has not become more skilled during that time? If a man had been familiar with the locomotives of 1876 and had not seen an engine since that time he might be inclined to question the mile long trains that are now being pulled. But that wouldn't alter the fact, would it? Better tools, more scientific methods of using them, easier sheep to shear, and, shall we say, rather better, or more ambitious shearers have combined to make shearing much faster than it formerly was.

Trusting that this will be sufficient to cause you to revise your opinion I subscribe myself with the utmost good feeling,

Yours Sincerely,
FRANK C. ROBERTSON.

Port and Starboard

ONE of you caught a slip in "Old Father of Waters," that must have made the old salts around the Camp-Fire chuckle in their beards. You bet we take it in the right spirit, comrade Eldridge. Doesn't Alan LeMay's answer prove that?

I have been a reader of *Adventure* from cover to cover for quite a few years and have enjoyed it very much. I have never before written to Camp-Fire as I am a reader, not a writer, but I saw something so glaringly wrong, at least to a man acquainted with salt water customs, in Alan LeMay's story "Old Father of Waters", that I thought I would write and see if the practise of setting running lights on the Mississippi River was different than the custom on salt water.

In the Nov. issue on page 136 where the *Arnold Houston* is overtaking the *Betsy Grey*, there is a passage that reads "Her red starboard light, by some whim hung lower than the green light on her larboard stack, identified her past doubt."

Now, all the running lights I ever saw were red to port, and green to starboard, and furthermore how could he see the red and green lights if he was overtaking her.

Don't think I am saying this in a fault finding mood, far from it, for it is a corking good story and I enjoyed every word of it, but it is something that would be apparent to anyone who had any experience on salt water.

Well, here's hoping you take this in the right spirit.—CHAS. H. ELDRIDGE.

I want to thank you for calling attention to my break in the case of the running lights of the *Betsy Grey*—that was a bad one all right. I don't know how I came to pull it, unless it was because I am a born member of the Right and Left Club, of artillery fame. I certainly knew better.

It is true, though, that you can see both lights from astern—they are just a couple of lanterns hung high on the stacks. (The stacks on a river steamboat, of course, stand forward in a line parallel to the beam.) You can see only one light from a position abeam, but you can see both from bow or quarter.

Many things on the river differ from salt water practise, such as the persisting use of "larboard" for port; "stairs" for ladder; hurricane "roof" for hurricane deck; jackstaff in the bow, etc. But the colors of the lights are necessarily the same, since deep sea vessels were in the river before the first steamboat appeared on the Mississippi (1810).—ALAN LEMAY.

Along the Trail

VI

HE LIKES to sit in the shade in front of the post office, late afternoons, when everybody, from summer dudes to retired old-timers like himself, drops in for the mail. The little town of Rawhide, Wyoming, is the setting for a veritable pageant during dude season, a pageant in which is represented the old West, the new West, and the West that never was. Old Sam Tolliver, by his mere presence on the scene, adds a not inconsiderable tang to its salty flavor.

"No, it ain't nothin' like the old days," he replies to the inevitable query of every newcomer. He grins, and a certain glint comes to his eyes. I verily believe it to be a flicker of half malicious satisfaction that the old days have departed, beyond the profanation of such humans as are bred nowadays.

"They don't build 'em like they used to. Men! Women, too. They was folks that could out-fight a grizzly, out-drink a whale, and out-talk a parson. Why, I was in Leadville when she bust loose in '78 . . ."

His wanderings were Homeric. One must admire him. Either his memory or his imagination is of astounding breadth.

Once, out of sheer delight in the old man's amiable reminiscing, I listened to him for probably more than two hours. I did more than listen; I spurred him on. I think a suspicion finally came to him that my curiosity was not simple and undisguised. He had a queer and quite vulnerable pride, and was not easily fooled.

He made no mention of his suspicion at the time. In fact, he settled back comfortably as if for a prolonged session,

"The desert was the last gold country," he said. "I was a desert man myself, the last years. I ranged from the Furnace Creek country in the Mojave clear down to the Cocopas. Never struck it rich, but I made day wages, and more occasionally.

"I had a burro. She's dead now. I quit the desert when she died on me. Couldn't go back, without Bess along. There wasn't another burro like her west of the Rio Grande. Called her Queen Elizabeth first off; then Bess.

"Many's the time Bess saved my life. A feller gets careless, no matter how much experience he's had. You use up your water too fast, or forget the trails in strange country, or a sand storm comes along and changes the whole scenery so you don't know where you're at—and then you begin to get thirsty.

"Was you ever thirsty? Real thirsty, where there ain't no spring you know within fifty miles, and the last couple of drops is swishin' around in a hot canteen? It ain't exactly much like a church picnic. I know!

"And if you'll believe it, every time that happened Bess headed off on her own hook and found a waterhole. Yessir, she did; and the proof is that I'm here today to tell it to you. She'd stare at me kinda anxious when she knew the supply was low, and bray a few times and then start off at her funny trot in some outlandish direction—and dang if she wouldn't finish up at a waterhole. Yessir, every time!

"That burro was half human. She knew the value of water. She'd watch me fill the canteens to make sure I didn't forget any. Too many times she'd seen how precious just a couple of drops of water could be. . . .

"Then I found a pocket. I cleaned up a few thousand, and thought I was rich. It went plumb to my head. I went for a trip back East; my first time there. And I took Bess along. I didn't have much sense in them days.

"Yes, sure I took Bess along. Why not? She'd earned it, and it was our money, and danged if I couldn't do as I pleased with our own money! She traveled like old Queen Elizabeth herself, and had all the grain and sugar and bacon she could eat, and I rode along in the stock car with her myself.

"Then we come to Niagara Falls. That was to be our first stop-over, after leaving Chicago. I always wanted to see Niagara Falls. Seems like I'd always been hearing about it, and it was natural to want to look at it while we was in the neighborhood.

"Well, as I said, I didn't have much sense in them days. I didn't know. I never expected . . .

"Here was old Bess as happy as a medder lark, and me too, and we got off the train, and first thing we did was to ask the way to Niagara Falls. Some feller told us, and off we went. It wasn't far. We come on it all of a sudden, and there it was, roarin' and thunderin', and tons and tons of water going over that rim rock and tumbling away down every minute. It just took the breath away from me, and I stood there staring and staring at it. I never saw anything like it in all my born days.

"And then I thought of Bess. She was awful quiet. I turned toward her. She was standing there gazing at the falls, and there came a look in her eyes the like of which I never seen before or since, in man or animal. It was the pitifulest thing I ever see anywhere. There was despair and hopelessness and pain like she couldn't endure it any longer.

"'Bess!' I says. 'For gosh sakes, what's happened?'

"And all she did was roll her eyes toward me, and then close them—and fall over dead at my feet!

"Did you ever lose something you loved? I guess I needn't tell you how hard that hit me. Right at the start of our trip and us rich and all and happy as the day is long. But I didn't know. I couldn't expect—that. I never appreciated Bess's sensitive nature. . . .

"I told you she was half human, didn't I? There wasn't another burro like her anywhere. Do you know what killed her dead at my feet that day at Niagara Falls?"

Old Sam's recital had touched me, and I could only shake my head to the effect that I could not guess.

Old Sam leaned over and with all the fervor and sincerity of long lost love told me, "It was the sight of all that good water going to waste, and her sensitive desert-bred nature couldn't stand the shock!"

Well, the shock was too much for an audience which had silently gathered about us as the story progressed. I found myself the center of a group of natives who roared and choked and clung to each other in helpless laughter. I grew red in the face and essayed a feeble grin. But I could do nothing. I had taken it, hook, line and sinker.

And in old Sam's eye was a gleam of the most unholy and vindictive joy. If my sincerity had been open to question, we were now quits.

—TOI-YABE TOLMAN.

Old Copies

EUGENE CUNNINGHAM of our writers' brigade, wants to secure several back issues which are out of print. Can anyone help him out?

Eugene Cunningham finds his collection of printed stories lacking the *Adventures* of October 1922, June 10, 1923, November 10, 1923 and March 30, 1925. He offers a dollar apiece for these numbers. Communicate direct with him, 2605 Wheeling, El Paso, Texas.

New Blood

THERE always is joy among the editors of a magazine, when a new author of spirit and promise steps all unheralded from the morning mail. Whereas all *Adventure's* old favorites are sure of a rousing welcome, the chap just making his bow in Camp-Fire to-day may well be the sought after popular favorite of tomorrow.

I'm not in the habit of writing letters to editors but because you're bringing back the old thrill that made *Adventure* a man's magazine, I'm stopping long enough to say, "Keep up the good work! That's the kind of an *Adventure* we want."

You're injecting new blood by giving new writers a chance to show their goods. When a new name appears I read his story. If it doesn't hit me the first time I'll pass him up for a while and read a later story. If that fails to register, he's off my reading list. And Mr. Hoffman had surely assembled a lot of beautiful writers, who simply lived and wrote on past glory, that I did not intend to continue the subscription after its expiration. So, give us new blood, even if it is a bit uncouth and not polished. Few men ever listen to a finished lecturer but picture the fireside story tellers in log camps, mills, mines, and you'll get the idea of what I think should make up an *Adventure* magazine.

Tuttle, Lamb and Pendexter with a few others are my kind—oh, yes. Arthur Friel must not be forgotten.

That trophy room's a bully idea. Last fall I was in New York and I wanted to go up to the *Adventure* office and see the men putting out the magazine, but having never achieved any thing that would make my name sound like a Lindbergh, I thought, "Whatin'ell! I'm just another Jasper from the sticks, and what'll I say I dropped in for? A chat!" I did that little thing once or twice and met the office.

But a trophy room! In it I could have an excuse for coming when I'm in the lonesomest town in America—Li'l ol' New York—the untracked woods are friendlier.

Good luck! —FRANK A. HALVERSON.

How To Build a Cabin

ANSWERING a query in a late issue of the magazine, Comrade Shattuck refers to an authoritative volume of woodcraft instruction. Perhaps many other readers are interested in the subject.

I have just this moment read J. H. Hutchinson's question about log cabins in the December 1st issue of *Adventure*. There is a very good book on the subject which can be seen in any good library. The title is "Log Cabins and Cottages and How to Build and Furnish Them." It is published by *Forest and Stream*. The edition I have is dated 1908 and is the sixth. It is well illustrated with plans, elevations and figures showing how to cut and fit logs. Many interiors are also figured. I think that Mr. Hutchinson, if he is handy at planning, can work out a real log cabin for himself after studying this book.—DR. GEORGE B. SHATTUCK, Mt. Royal Station, Baltimore, Md.

The Story Vote

THE following letter—one of over a hundred which have come in thus far—illustrates a difficulty in the tabulation. Three out of four patrons name in order the authors—not the individual stories—they like best. Well, fundamentally this is what I wanted to know; and if it makes the vote appear in somewhat different fashion from that I had imagined, the result will be much the same.

First off, I want to thank you for changing back to the old style covers. It makes the whole magazine seem like itself again. As I have been a reader since 1913 and have all the copies since 1914, I feel that I can make the above statement honestly and truthfully. Unlike some of the magazines of today, you seem to be able to get stories from the authors who know how to please me. They know life and how a man really reacts under various conditions. They have that art of establishing a contact between their story and myself, that, as it begins to unfold, I am an invisible watcher and listener who follows their actions and happenings as tho it were really happening right before me.

Leonard H. Nason is the author I read when I have the blues, and I can reread him times without number and still enjoy his real fellows. W. C. Tuttle can write the most intermixed action yet make it understandable, which I cannot say about quite a number of the authors who write western stories. In fact, I am almost off westerns as few of the writers of today, for their scenes and the overdrawn characters are not human but more like puppets. Thomson Burtis is another I thoroughly enjoy. Then comes Arthur O. Friel, Georges Surdez, Gordon MacCreagh, John Webb and Talbot Mundy. All men who have fared far and know of what they write. It is a good thing that the other magazines do not choose as you do, printing only the real stories by the writers that know of what they write; know how to use simple sentences and words, so that they say exactly what they want to say in a way that the reader also only gets what they mean. I would that I could write with their skill and simplicity for it is a gift few of us have.

—S. W. HENDERSON.

ASK *Adventure*

For *free information* and *services* you can't get **elsewhere**

California Tuna

A GOOD man makes a handsome wage at this angling. How the wily Japanese simulates a school of sardines.

Request:—"Will you kindly give me information about tuna fishing off the coast of California as follows: About the usual size of trolling boats used. What would be the value of a day, month or season's catch of one, say, 36-foot boat (trolling)?

Do these boats carry ice?"—E. D. LALONDE, Olympia, Wash.

Reply, by Mr. E. E. Harriman:—The fishing boats used most in our southern waters are gas boats with engines of from 2 to 8 H. P., carrying from 1 to 4 men, even up to 8 men in the largest sized. I have seen dozens of boats with but 2 men on board. Then I have counted 11 Japanese on one 8 H. P. boat. Never have I seen more than 6 white men manning such a boat, excepting in two cases, where Italians owned and manned the craft.

I have known one fisherman who ran a little boat alone and earned $1,600 in four months.

These gas boats cost from $900 to $2,000 each very often.

Guessing the value of a day, month or season catch would be folly. On the same day I saw one crew of three men bring in two and a half times as much in weight as another crew of four men. It is all owing to which boat strikes a large school of fish.

Our fishermen are not given to trolling as much as they are to deep sea hand lining and surface fishing with rods. The albacore or, as they are now known, long fin tuna, are caught in great numbers by Japs who use bamboo poles, bait with sardines, then flip water with bamboo poles having a flat bit of wood on the outer end. This makes water in drops rain down around the bait, which is at the surface, and the fish think a small school of sardines is playing there and dash in.

I have watched the Japs fishing in this way many times and have at such a time taken a 30 pound albacore in that way myself.

The boats do not carry ice for the most part, as they catch their load within a short run of some port and run in to leave the fish in a refrigerating plant, dressing out as they come in. I have seen many tons of such fish unloaded at Avalon, Santa Catalina Island, and immediately iced and loaded on a steamer for the mainland, 30 miles away. A great many fishing boats run into San Pedro, Long Beach and other ports.

A 36 foot boat would here be manned by at least six men.

Boats of that length often go south into Mexican waters to fish and take the fish into San Diego to ice and ship them. On runs like that ice may be carried along, since the run to port is long. Mexican laws must be observed or a gunboat is likely to chase the fishermen, and they shoot very frequently.

Our fishing is better down here than farther north. Many millions of dollars are paid for fish at our harbor at San Pedro each year.

Ideas for the Service

CIVILIANS often wonder just what rights of criticism and suggestion for the betterment of his outfit are permitted the men in the Service. Here is a statement of Army policy in this regard:

Request:—"If a private has new ideas about tactics and the deployment of troops, what is the best and proper way for him to prepare and submit them to the War Department?

I would also like to know if there are any correspondence schools through which I could obtain a commission."—PVT. WILHELM F. LUCKNER, Company L, 2d Inf. Fort Brady, Mich.

Reply, by Lieutenant Glen R. Townsend:—Any person in the military service who has suggestions for the improvement of the Service should submit them in writing through his commanding officer. If the suggestions pertain to the Army as a whole they may be set forth in a letter addressed to the Adjutant General and forwarded through the regular military channels. If the suggestions refer only to an organization or to one station they should be forwarded through channels to the proper commanding officer. I suggest that you frankly talk your ideas over with your company commander and ask his assistance in preparing them.

Contrary, perhaps, to a widespread belief, the Army welcomes new ideas and suggestions for improvement. But one must not be impatient if his ideas are not instantly accepted. Suggestions for change must be considered in the light of all available knowledge and experience. If it is sometimes thought that military leaders are slow to adopt changes one should remember the penalty which war imposes for any mistake or hasty judgment.

You can not obtain a commission through a correspondence school although some good school of the sort might help you to prepare for the examination. There are two ways for enlisted men to try for a commission. One is to take the examinations for entrance to West Point and the other to take the examinations for commission direct. Both examinations are held annually. At most stations men who wish to try for a commission are given an opportunity to attend a school under a specially qualified officer. This is both better and cheaper than a correspondence school. Your best plan is to consult your commanding officer about this matter also.

Navajo Blankets

IN THE old days you could use your blanket as a water reservoir, if so you desired.

Request:—"It has occurred to me that possibly you would be willing to be of assistance in the matter of obtaining some genuine Navajo rugs or blankets.

If such is the case, will you please tell me from whom I can obtain them, and if possible, give some information as to their approximate cost. Of course I realize that this will vary according to weight and size, and possibly pattern.

I shall also be very appreciative if you can tell me how one can be certain of the genuineness of such articles."—H. M. SNYDER, Rochelle, Illinois.

Reply, by Mr. E. E. Harriman:—Lorenzo Hubbell, Oraibi, Navajo Reservation, Arizona, will sell you Navajo rugs made by Indians near his place. When I was in his store he showed me great piles of them along his walls. Any you buy of him will be those made by the Navajo Indians, therefore genuine, but not any of them the old time yarn or old time weave. The Navajo now sells his wool and buys Germantown yarns, which he and his squaw weave into rugs, blankets, serapes and saddle blankets. The old time Navajo blankets had a waterproof quality; you could hang one up by its four corners, pour a few gallons of water in it and leave it overnight, then in the morning pour the water into an olla and have within a few cupfuls of as much as you poured in the evening before.

The new blanket is not at all like that.

The prices vary. You should not try to buy without seeing them.

I once bought, in 1902, one at $10.50 and one at $15, what would at this time cost $25 and $40. The trader at Juadito Spring showed me one runner, 5 feet wide, 16 feet long, at $40, in June, 1922.

I know where there is one of the finest of old time blankets, that is valued at $5,000. It is considered justly to be the best of its kind now in existence. A really good Navajo blanket is worth $40 to $75 at this time, even of the new weave. There are as many grades of weaving, nearly, as there are weavers and every squaw and half the men weave.

Take a blanket of the early Seventies and get hold of a man who is versed in the art and he will read a story, a family history or a battle story right off the design. All Indian art is filled with such tales.

South America

HERDS of cattle it takes four hours to get through on a passenger train. For the adventurer, a few leads in gold and diamond hunting.

Request:—"Would you please answer these questions on South America?

1. What section is best adapted to cattle raising?
2. What section is best adapted to cattle raising and dairying conditions?
3. What price does the land come to; and how about taxes?
4. In what section are the most Americans settled?
5. What section offers the greatest opportunity to an adventurer in your belief?
6. What section offers the greatest opportunities for a builder or general contractor?
7. Laws, foreign land ownership, passports, citizenship, etc.?"—MARC H. SHELLEY, Myrtle Point, Oregon.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—Possibly the best free literature for general information on South America is contained in the booklets published by the Pan American Union, Washington, D. C.

1. Southern Brazil. I saw herds of cattle down there it took four hours to get through with a passenger train. Uruguay, Paraguay, and Argentine come next. Cattle are also raised in Venezuela in large quantities, in large quantities on the llanos of Colombia, and to a smaller extent in all the other republics. Sheep do well in the Andes. The llama,

which is nothing more than a big sheep, is indigenous. I would put southern Brazil right about the top for cattle. Zebu blood is mixed with the native stock as a prevention against tick fever.

2. Dairying is something else again. There are a few approaching our own sort near Buenos Aires and Montevideo. The Brazilian government is also experimenting with dairies. You can get dope on this by writing to the Ministro de Agricultura, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He has five American experts from Montana with him and will answer a letter written in English. The dairies near the other big cities are in local hands. They have some fine stock they are trying out, mainly English and Dutch cows. I have forgotten the addresses of the large ones.

3. Prices for land range from nothing for good government land in undeveloped areas to stiff prices for good land near the cities and large towns. Taxes vary also but most of the republics make all sorts of concessions to a legitimate settler.

4. The most Americans are with the large mining camps, such as the Cerro de Pasco, the Guggenheim subs (Chili Copper and Chili Exploration), the big oil companies, and in private business in such cities as Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. There are a few in all the big cities and you will strike a rare one all over doing some ranching, running a shop or doing something like that.

5. The greatest adventure hunting country would possibly be as follows: on the hog back of country between British Guiana and Brazil, looking for the mother lode of the diamonds they have been picking up for years on the upper Essiquebo (?); ditto down around Diamantino where the big field is playing out (these diamonds are worth more than the African ones); looking for the eight or ten millions of dollars' worth of gold the Inca subjects hid after Atahuallpa was killed at Cajamarca; finding a buried city as Hiram Bingham did in the Andes; trying to unearth a *huaca* in the old Chan-Chan ruins near Truxillo, Peru. About $15,000,000 has been found there, not including the *big fish* treasure which has never been unearthed. The *little fish* ran to $8,000,000.

Other possibilities are: hunting for gold mines in eastern Bolivia (See the book "Adventures in Bolivia" by C. H. Prodgers, published by Dodd, Mead and Co., New York); prospecting in various other countries; putting up a trading post on the upper Amazon near the big falls in the Jivero country; ranching anywhere on the eastern Andes; peddling with a pack back and forth across the Andes from the highlands; raising sheep in the islands south of Punta Arenas; and a hundred other things. The field for an adventurer is very big in South America.

6. Possibly Brazil. There are big contracts let there and they favor Americans all the time. Either Byington and Co. or George and Arturo Krug of Sao Paulo, Brazil, might be able to give you the dope in this line. Both these outfits have made big money.

7. The land laws and other laws vary a bit in each republic. Most of the salient points are given in the Pan American booklet. Passports are obtained from our own Secretary of State, Washington, D. C., upon payment of $10 and usual small photos and witnesses with letter. You can get a circular from them in advance telling the details of what you must do. Citizenship requirements vary from a plain declaration to something like our own plan up here.

Porto Rican Coat-of-Arms

THIS gorgeous insignia is a restoration of the original coat-of-arms of the Spanish colony.

Request:—"What emblems are on the coat-of-arms of Porto Rico? Will you please give a description of them?"—John W. Jones, Durango, Colo.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—The present coat-of-arms of the island of Porto Rico was adopted in 1905, and it is a restoration of the original arms of the Spanish colony of "the rich port." Therefore it is in all its parts reminiscent of the Spanish times. On a green circular field is a lamb of silver on a red-bound book and bearing the cross crowned banner of Christ. This is the device ascribed to St. John. Above the lamb are the gold crowned letters F and I—Ferdinand and Isabella. Surrounding the green field is a white border edged with gold. Upon this border are the castles of Castile, the crowned red lions that proclaim Leon, the crosses of Jerusalem, and the standards of Spain in the days when the star of her fame was at its zenith.

The Quick Draw

DON'T consider yourself proficient till you can toss up an object six inches in diameter and, using the same hand to draw your gun, hit said object two or three times before it comes to earth.

Request:—"I would appreciate it very much if you would give your opinion on the Heiser halfbreed holster. I have been using an open belt holster and have it well broken in, but it seems bulky. I am a railroad police officer, and use a .38 S. P. W. special.

Would also appreciate any tip you would care to give me on the Quick Draw."—Earl Teets, Buffalo, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—I've not used to any extent the holster you mention. I know it's quite well liked by many practical users of revolvers and pistols, but my own holsters of the shoulder spring variety are Hardy Quickdraw or Furnsnow Shoulder Spring ones.

As for quick drawing, I'll say that the only practical way I know of is PRACTISE and then some more of the same. The holster should be laced to hang in the correct position, which for me is with the revolver butt as nearly forward of the armpit as is possible.

Then practise drawing the revolver, not by pulling it upward from the holster as many people do, and as is the correct method with the pouch holster, but snapping it away from the holster by slapping the fingers around the grip and knocking the grip downward, and the fingers wrap about it, thus clearing the revolver from the retaining spring.

Continue the motion, thrusting the revolver towards your mark, either using the double action feature or cocking the revolver as it comes in line with your target. Practise only will make perfect, and I advise plenty of it in your room, apart from any onlookers. First without your coat, and after you have become proficient in this detail put on your coat and resume practice.

When you can toss an object six inches across into the air, and draw the revolver with the same hand you used in tossing the object and hit the said target two or three times ere it comes to earth, you have reached a practical stage. It will take time and ammunition, but is fully possible, as I know many men who can do it easily.

Another Catfish Recipe

DO YE knights of the chafing dish and electric grill yearn for literary combat? Then let Mr. Kephart know how you relish his idea.

Letter:—"Regarding your article in the December 1st issue of *Adventure*, on catfish stew:

This is along the lines what was called catfish chowder in the old days before prohibition and was served as a free lunch in a good many bars.

As to making: Take your catfish, dip in hot water and skin.

Then put in water and boil until you can take the meat from the bones, using heads if you want to. Take:

5 lbs. of the catfish meat
6 large Irish potatoes, boiled and diced up small
4 large onions sliced thin
¾ lb. white salt bacon, sliced thin
¼ lb. butter

Put pot on fire, put 4 slices bacon in first, then a layer of fish, layer of potatoes, layer of onions, salt and pepper, then a dab of butter, and continue in this manner until all is used up, then put in a teacup of the stock the fish was cooked in, put on a slow fire, cover tight and cook on a slow fire for 1½ hours. Do not stir. This is plain.

If you want to elaborate, instead of using the fish stock water, use cup and a half of canned tomatoes, carrots, celery; all to taste. Then get out your 'home brew' and go to it. Regards."—J. J. CONWAY, Etowah, Tenn.

Reply, by Mr. Horace Kephart:—Your recipe for Catfish Chowder takes me back to good old days. I wish other readers of *Adventure* who know of good camp dishes and how to fix 'em would send in the recipes.

Not long ago Mac Sheridan compiled a "Stag Cook Book" to which a hundred of America's statesmen, writers, artists, scientists and other prominent men contributed the secrets of their favorite dishes. It's a bully little book for amateurs who monkey with the chafing dish and the electric grill in town, with groceries and markets handy to supply the fresh ingredients. But—

Why can't a hundred adventurers chip in their discoveries of rare good grub concocted at the campfire out of such materials as are found in the backwoods or can be carried there on pack-mule, man's back, canoe or motor-car?

I tried something of the sort in my book on "Camping and Woodcraft," but that was only one man's effort. Let's have a symposium of outdoor men and women on the subject of Good Eats in Camp. Compared to this vital and transcendent matter the Dayton debate on evolution was fiddle-faddle and Freudianism is flapdoodle.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard small launch river and lake tripping and cruising.*—Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organizations, official meetings, regattas.*—Edgar S. Perkins, 841 Lake St., Oak Park, Illinois.

Yachting Beriah Brown, Coupeville, Wash., or Henry W. Rubinkam, Chicago Yacht Club, Box 507, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating George W. Sutton, 6 East 45th St., New York City.

Motor Camping John D. Long, 610 W. 16th St., New York City.

Motor Vehicles *Operation, operating cost, legislative restrictions, public safety.*—Edmund B. Neil, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.* John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers *including foreign and American makes.*—Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons, *pole arms and armor.*—Robert E. Gardner, 429 Wilson Ave., Columbus, Ohio.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Health hazard of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.*—Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel, right exercise, food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.*—Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Hiking Claude P. Fordyce, M.D., Falls City, Neb.

Camp Cooking Horace Kephart, Bryson City, N. C.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect; how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions on investment excluded.*—Victor Shaw, Loring, Alaska.

Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting; guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—Ernest W. Shaw, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—William R. Barbour, care *Adventure.*

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work; duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. Newman, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign Lieut. Glen R. Townsend, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—Lieut. Francis Greene, U. S. N. R., 2127 Tenth St., Port Arthur, Texas.

U. S. Marine Corps Lieut. F. W. Hopkins, Fleet Marine Corps Reserves, Box 1042, Medford, Oregon.

State Police Francis H. Bent, Jr., care *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Patrick Lee, c/o William H. Souls, 1481 Beacon St., Boston, Massachusetts.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—Thomas H. Dameron, 911 S. Union Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—Arthur Woodward, Museum of American Indians, 155th St. and Broadway, N. Y. City.

Taxidermy Seth Bullock, care *Adventure.*

Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and amphibians (frogs toads, salamanders); their customs, habits and distribution.*—Dr. G. K. Noble, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St. and Central Park West, New York, N. Y.

Entomology *General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.; distribution.*—Dr. Frank E. Lutz, Ramsey, N. J.

Ichthyology George S. Myers, Stanford University, Box 821, Calif.

Stamps H. A. Davis, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals Howland Wood, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—Paul L. Anderson, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

Linguistics and Ethnology (*a*) *Racial and tribal tradition, history and psychology; folklore and mythology.* (*b*) *Languages and the problems of race migration, national development and descent (authorities and bibliographies).* (*c*) *Individual languages and language-families; interrelation of tongues, their affinities and plans for their study.*—Dr. Neville Whymant, 345 W. 23rd St., New York City.

Track Jackson Scholz, 303 W. 107 St., New York City.

Tennis Fred Hawthorne, Sports Dept., New York *Herald Tribune,* New York City.

Basketball Joe F. Carr, 16 E. Broad St., Columbus, Ohio.

Bicycling Arthur J. LeaMond, 469 Valley St., South Orange, New Jersey.

Swimming Louis DeB. Handley, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skating Frank Schreiber, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. Price, 160 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Hockey "Daniel," *The Evening Telegram,* 73 Dey St., New York City.

Archery Earl B. Powell, Terrace Hotel, Sidney, Ohio.

Boxing James P. Dawson, The New York *Times,* Times Square, New York City.

Fencing John V. Grombach, 60 East 34 Street, New York City.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (See next two sections.)—Beriah Brown, Coupeville, Wash.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American shipping.*—Harry E. Rieseberg, Apartment 330-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C.

The Sea Part 3 *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—Captain A. E. Dingle, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 4 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.)—Capt. Dingle, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 5 *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.*—Capt. Dingle, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 6 *Arctic Ocean (Siberian Waters).*—Capt. C. L. Oliver, care *Adventure.*

Hawaii Dr. Neville Whymant, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

South Sea Islands James Stanley Meagher, 5316 Pine Street, Inglewood, Calif.

Philippine Islands Buck Connor, L. B. 4, Quartzsite, Ariz.

Borneo Capt. Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.*

★**New Guinea** *Questions regarding the policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. Armit, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia.

★**New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa.** Tom L. Mills, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan.*—Gordon MacCreagh, 21 East 14th St., New York.

Asia Part 2 *Annam, Laos, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin China.*—Dr. Neville Whymant, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Asia Part 3 *Southern and Eastern China.*—Dr. Neville Whymant, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Asia Part 4 *Western China, Burma, Tibet.* Capt. Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.*

★**Asia Part 5** *Northern China and Mongolia.*—George W. Twomey, M. D., 60 Rue de l'Amirauté, Tientsin, China, and Dr. Neville Whymant, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Asia Part 6 *Japan.*—Sidney Herschel Small, San Rafael, Calif., and O. E. Riley, 4 Huntington Ave., Scarsdale, New York.

Asia Part 7 *Persia, Arabia.*—Captain Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.*

Asia Minor.—Dr. Neville Whymant, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Africa Part 1 *Egypt.*—Dr. Neville Whymant, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

✠**Africa Part 2** *Sudan.*—W. T. Moffat, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England.

Africa Part 3 *Tripoli. Including the Sahara, Tuaregs, caravan trade and caravan routes.*—Captain Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 4 *Tunis and Algeria.*—Dr. Neville Whymant, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Africa Part 5 *Morocco.*—George E. Holt, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 6 *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria.*—W. C. Collins, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 7 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand.*—Captain F. J. Franklin, Gulfport and Coast Enquiry Depot, Turnbull Bldg., Gulfport, Miss.

✠**Africa Part 8** *Portuguese East.*—R. G. Waring, 14837 Grand River Ave., Detroit, Michigan.

South America Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile.*—Edgar Young, care *Adventure.*

South America Part 2 *Venesuela, the Guianas and Brasil.*—Paul Vanorden Shaw, 21 Claremont Ave., New York, N. Y.

West Indies *Cuba, Isle of Pines, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups.*—Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif.

Central America *Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala.*—Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif.

Mexico Part 1 *Northern. Border States of old Mexico, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.*—J. W. Whiteaker, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Mexico Part 2 *Southern, Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan.*—C. R. Mahaffey, 236 Fox Ave., San José, Calif.

Mexico Part 3 *Southeastern. Federal Territory of Quintana Roo and states of Yucatan and Campeche.* Also archeology.—W. Russell Sheets, 301 Popular Ave., Takoma Park, Md.

Newfoundland.—C. T. James, Bonaventure Ave., St. Johns, Newfoundland.

Greenland Also dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).—Victor Shaw, Loring, Alaska.

Canada Part 1 *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.* Also homesteading in Canada Part 1, and fur farming.—Fred L. Bowden, 5 Howard Avenue, Binghamton, New York.

✠**Canada Part 2** *Southeastern Quebec.* Jas. F. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 3** *Height of Land Region, Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec, Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin.* Trips for Sport and Adventure—big game, fishing, canoeing, Northland travel, also H. B. Company Posts, Indian tribes and present conditions.—S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), 1805 Stroh Building, Detroit, Michigan.

✠**Canada Part 4** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 5** *Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario.* Also national parks.—A. D. Robinson, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada.

Canada Part 6 *Hunters Island and English River District.*—T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn.

Canada Part 7 *Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.* Also yachting.—C. Plowden, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C.

Canada Part 8 *The Northw. Ter. and the Arctic, especially Ellesmere Land, Baffinland, Melville and North Devon Islands, North Greenland and the half-explored islands west of Ellesmere.*—Patrick Lee, c/o William H. Souls, 1481 Beacon St., Boston, Massachusetts.

★**Canada Part 9** *Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin.*—Lionel H. G. Moore, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada.

Alaska. Also mountain work.—Theodore S. Solomons, 4821 Lemon Grove Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S. Part 1 *Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Aris.*—E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Western U. S. Part 2 *New Mexico.* Also Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance.—F. H. Robinson, Albuquerque, Box 445, New Mexico.

Western U. S. Part 3 *Colo. and Wyo.*—Frank Earnest, Keyport, New Jersey.

Western U. S. Part 4 *Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.*—Fred W. Egelston, 1029 Litch Court, Reno, Nev.

Western U. S. Part 5 *Idaho and Surrounding Country.*—R. T. Newman, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Western U. S. Part 6 *Tex. and Okla.*—J. W. Whiteaker, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S. Part 1 *The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.* Especially early history of Missouri Valley.—Joseph Mills Hanson, care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 2 *Mo. and Ark. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Especially wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps.*—John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 3 *Ind., Ill., Mich., Minn., and Lake Michigan.* Also clamming, natural history, legends.—John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 4 *Mississippi River.* Also routes, connections, itineraries; river-steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions about working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears.—Geo. A. Zerr, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa.

Middle Western U. S. Part 5 *Lower Mississippi River. (St. Louis down), Atchafalaya across La. swamps, St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottoms.*—Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, Calif.

Middle Western U. S. Part 6 *Great Lakes.* Also seamanship, navigation, courses, distances, reefs and shoals, lights and landmarks, charts; laws, fines, penalties, river navigation.—H. C. Gardner, 3302 Daisy Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

Eastern U. S. Part 1 *Eastern Maine. For all territory east of the Penobscot River.*—H. B. Stanwood, East Sullivan, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 2 *Western Maine. For all territory west of the Penobscot River.*—Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 3 *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I. and Mass.*—Howard R. Voight, P. O. Box 1332, New Haven, Conn.

Eastern U. S. Part 4 *Adirondacks, New York.*—Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S. Part 5 *Maryland and District of Columbia.* Also historical places.—Lawrence Edmund Allen, 1505 C St. S. E., Washington, D. C.

Eastern U. S. Part 6 *Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard.* Also sawmilling, saws.—Hapsburg Liebe, care *Adventure.*

Eastern U. S. Part 7 *Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia.*—Paul M. Fink, Jonesboro, Tenn.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for five cents.)*
✠ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

The TRAIL AHEAD

The next issue of ADVENTURE

A Complete Novel

The Gold Pan Nugget

By Charles Snow

Luck walked with *Jim Beveridge*, gentleman, in the 1849 goldfields. But when he began wearing his Sunday clothes on weekday evenings to court the singing girl at the Esperanza, he invited tragedy. For he unknowingly aroused the killer's cunning in *Linn Satterbee*, who coveted his gold, his girl and his symbol of luck—the gold pan nugget.

Two *Novelettes*

Tramp Ship Style

By Albert Richard Wetjen

Two months the skipper dallied in the cobalt harbor, for the *Indanus* was unseaworthy, and his nerve had been killed by drink. Then he died quite suddenly, leaving to his young junior officers the perilous task of bringing back to Frisco a sinking hulk manned by human bilge from the dockside, who had been herded aboard by a crimp at five dollars a head . . .

Fight on Foot!

By Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson

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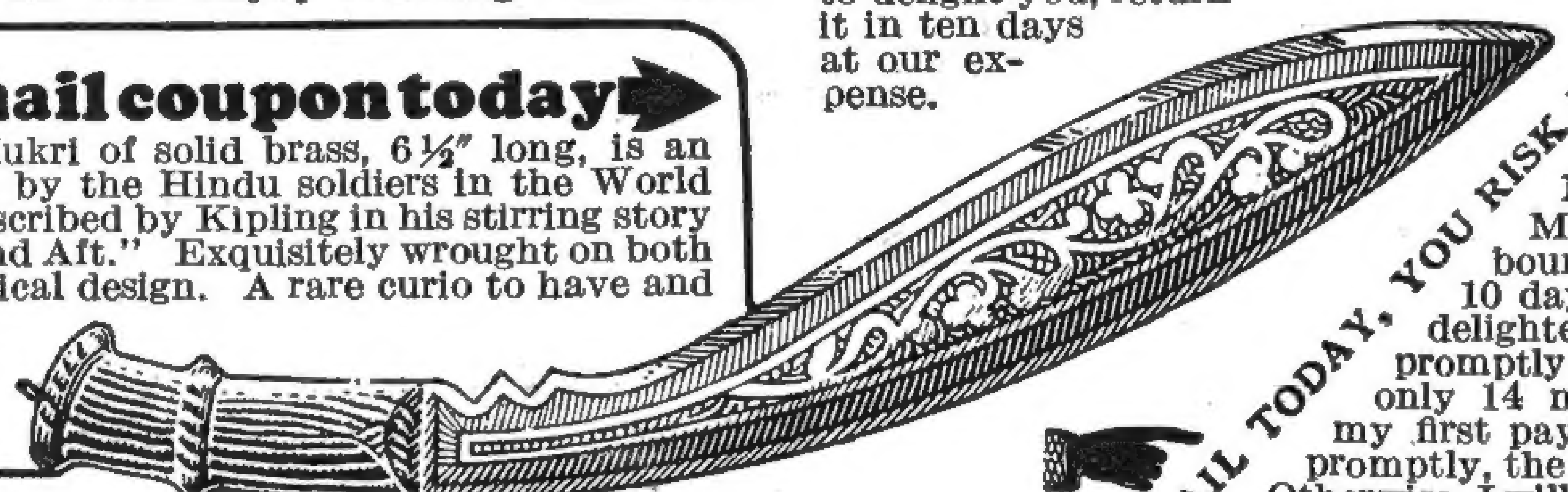

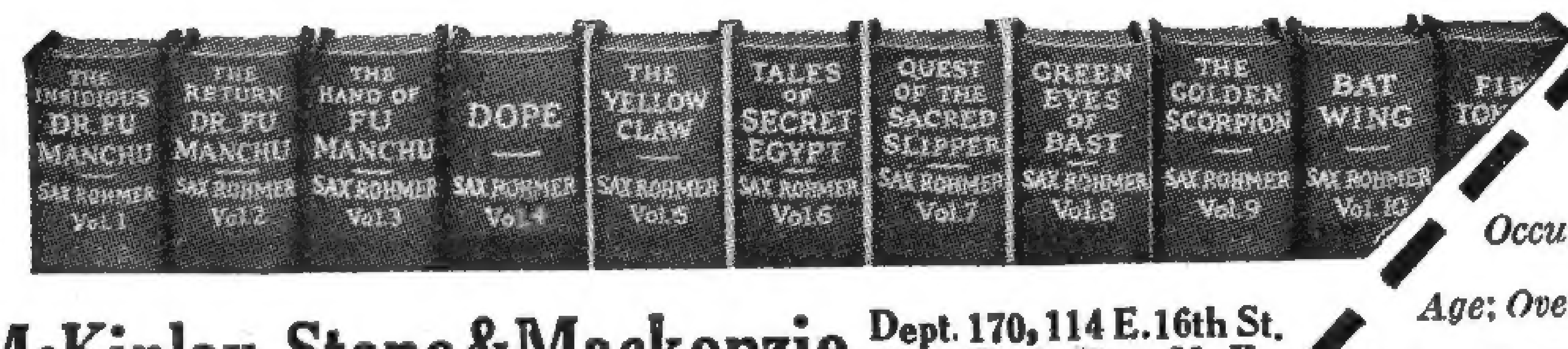
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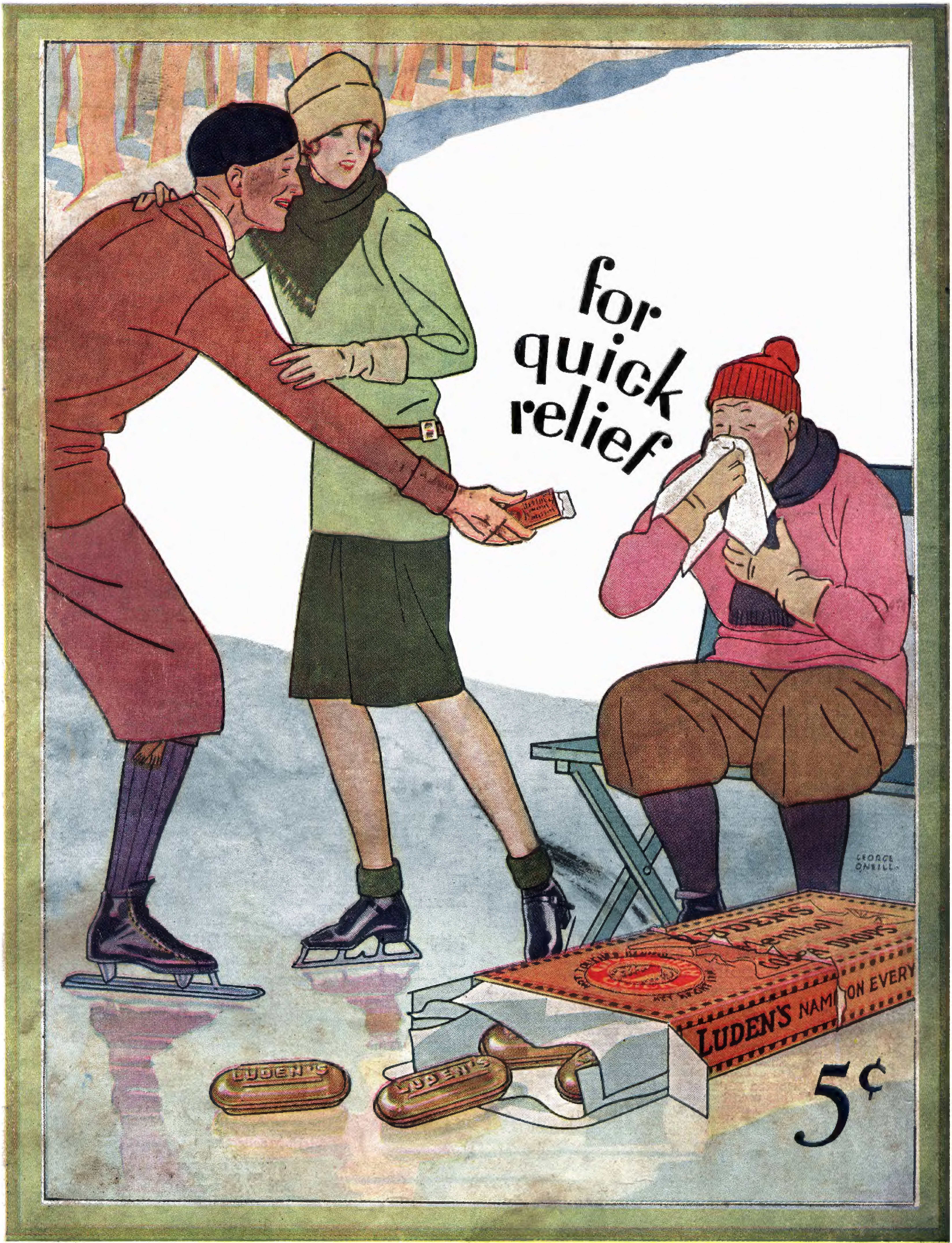
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